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MR. VAUGHAN'S HEIR.

A Novel.

BY

FRANK LEE BENEDICT,

AUTHOR OF 'MISS DOROTHY'S CHARGE,' &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MR. VAUGHAN'S HEIR.

CHAPTER I.

BACK TO LIFE.

THE glorious sunlight of a spring morning shines into the room; the window is open; the breeze enters too, whispering softly, bringing the voices o f the birds and the scent of the early flowers on its wings—a room in the Californian villa where old Mr. Vaughan died, the large, cheerful library which he had fitted up with the care one naturally bestows upon an apartment that is to be the favourite shrine in the sanctuary of home.

Launce Cromlin sits here this morning, leaning back in his easy chair, a little weary from the effort of having been helped out of

his chamber for the first time since that terrible illness struck him down. Launce has been away off close to the gates of Death since then,—so close that often in moments of semi-consciousness he seemed to hear familiar voices call to him from the other side, and wondered dreamily that those friends did not open the great portals and let him through. Before his reviving faculties reached even such vague, disconnected attempts at thought, there were long weeks of wild delirium, followed by still longer weeks whose record must always remain a blank—when the soul made no sign to denote its presence in the earthly tabernacle—when for days and nights, and nights and days, it needed the skill of physicians or sage nurses to be certain that a faint ray of the mysterious power we call vitality still lingered in the dull, senseless frame.

He has been well cared for—that seemed to Mr. Carstoe a plain duty; but the quiet, reticent man has gone beyond the exactions of this chill word. Were Launce his son,—that dream son who sometimes finds a place in the solitary old bachelor's musings, practical as he is,—more earnestness and devotion could not have been displayed. So to-day they have moved the convalescent into the library.

Strength and its accompanying restlessness have begun to return, and life is to go on once more and slip gradually back into its ordinary channels. Launce is always hungry or sleepy, or reversing the order of those requirements, and Mr. Carstoe and the stiff housekeeper are delighted with his prodigies in both lines. Launce begins to wonder in his quaint way whether his proper soul did not make its exit during that long blank, and the soul of a cormorant or some antediluvian creature with huge appetite take advantage of the rightful owner's absence to assume possession of his corporeal frame.

"Mercy sakes! he aint flighty again, is he?" asks the housekeeper in an audible whisper, when she hears Launce expressing his absurd fancy to Mr. Carstoe.

"No, no, Mrs. Simpson; I am all right," Launce replies laughing.

"Then the best thing you can do is to stay so," observes Simpson, erect and rigid. She has come in a sort to regard Launce as her property after all the care she has bestowed, and is inclined to show her interest by scolding him now and then—a liberty which he finds rather pleasant than otherwise. "So please don't let us hear any talk about your being

any of those creeturs that aint to be found any more than Jonah's whale. We had enough of that when you was stretched on your back and knowed no better," adds Simpson.

"I suppose I talked an awful lot of rubbish?" Launce says.

"I suppose you did," retorted Simpson, arranging the sofa cushions, just to have the satisfaction of doing something for this patient who will soon pass from under her charge. She does her work so deftly, and looks so preternaturally grim when most solicitous, that she affords Launce a great deal of amusement.

It is Sunday, so Mr. Carstoe has leisure to spend the whole day with the young man, and Launce makes him talk till Simpson several times bustles in and scolds them both. Simpson has an idea that men are only gigantic children, and need to be grumbled at on every possible occasion.

The doctor pays his visit, and pronounces the convalescent doing as nicely as possible, and Simpson, ready to cry with delight, fairly scolds the doctor too, and remarks generally, "that she doesn't like to hear folks shout till they're out of the woods! That's her way, and she's never yet seen any reason to change it."

But it does not appear that in this case the physician has shouted too soon. Launce, as the days go by, gets gradually stronger, and the youthful face, that looked so like a mask during those awful weeks, has begun, worn and emaciated as it is, to catch the tints and expression of returning health. The mental lassitude, the difficulty to grasp and hold thought steadily, passes too, and once more life looks warm and hopeful, and Launce longs to be busy with its interests and labours. Mr. Carstoe comes in one morning while Launce is trying his strength in walking about, and wondering how long it will be before he can again use pencil and brush. Mr. Carstoe has letters in his hand—the letters he and Darrell Vaughan wrote to apprise Launce of his uncle's death. The agent has had them returned.

"I wanted you to see," he says, finding Launce able to talk and occupy himself a little, "that there was no delay on your cousin's part or mine."

Launce looks at the address upon the envelopes, and looks at the wrinkled, kindly face before him. If there was some reason for managing to delay these letters, Mr. Carstoe knows nothing about it—of that Launce is certain. He reads the pages, and smiles rather

scornfully at the possibility of his accepting a legacy left him on such terms. He is too just to feel angry with his cousin on that score—at least Darrell had nothing to do with the bequest or its restrictions. His letter too is kind, affectionate even—just a little patronizing perhaps, but at this Launce can afford to be amused.

"Have you heard lately from Vaughan?" he asks.

"Not very lately; one letter in answer to mine about your illness. He was extremely glad you were here with me."

"It has been a lucky thing for me that I did reach you before that fever came on," Launce replies, stretching out his hand.

Mr. Carstoe grows shy and awkward at once. He does not like to be thanked, and seems fairly ashamed of himself.

"Well, well, you are going on famously now," he says.

"Yes; I shall soon be able to get away."

"Dear me; yes, of course," observed Mr. Carstoe in a regretful tone, rubbing his nose the while. "Naturally; but you must not hurry too much. Let things work awhile; we don't want any risk of getting that fever back."

"Upon my word, although I have been such a bother, I believe you and that good Mrs.

Simpson will be rather sorry to have me go," says Launce laughing, though he chokes; for he is still weak enough to be easily touched and made childish.

"Sir," says Mr. Carstoe, scowling as portentously as if he were about to utter some awful threat, "the Lord forbid that I should speak for any female, especially one as capable of speaking for herself as Mrs. Simpson. But *I* shall be sorry, and so will she—I can take it on myself to say so much for her."

"It was falling among good Samaritans indeed," Launce answers. "I shall be sorry to leave you both, Mr. Carstoe. I have wasted a great deal of time though. I want to be up and doing. You see I have not stumbled over several hundred thousand dollars, and must make my way in the world."

"Just so, just so," observes Mr. Carstoe musingly. "It would have been different if there had been time, I am sure of that."

"Perhaps so; but indeed I am not caring about the money. Of course everybody would like to be rich; but I have my profession, and I may say, without vanity, that I have not done ill."

"I am glad of that; very glad."

Mr. Carstoe is remembering the impression

Darrell had produced on his mind in regard to this young man, and decides that Vaughan was mistaken utterly in his estimate of Cromlin, although usually so clear and correct in his judgments.

"I don't know much about your business—I suppose that is not the proper word; but I have enjoyed looking over those sketch-books of yours, and—and—so has Mrs. Simpson." Mr. Carstoe finishes his sentence with this jerking mention of Simpson, simply because he is shy about expressing his feelings. "Now I should think—I don't mean to offer suggestions—but being here among new scenery as it were—mightn't you, for example, do something among our mountains, and so on, a little?"

"I should be glad of the chance; but you see I am anxious to go back to Europe—I left very suddenly." Launce feels himself colouring, and hastens to add,—"Some time I shall hope to come again to California and see it thoroughly."

Mr. Carstoe is thinking of the codicil, and, slow man though he is, has a perception that Miss Crauford is in the young man's mind; it is Miss Crauford, not the money—somehow Mr. Carstoe is certain of that.

"Just so, just so," he observes, running his hands through his short hair till it stands up like a grey iron netting all over his head.

"Now if you are at leisure I want to have a little talk," Launce says. "Would it bore you to go over the conversation we had the night of my arrival? I get it confused when I try to think. I believe I must have been ill even then, though I recollect our visit to the prison."

It is all made clear to Launce again—all except that impenetrable mystery which shrouds the evil deed his uncle so long believed him to have committed: there is no light to be thrown on that.

"Thank God, at least he lived to know I was innocent!" Launce says. "But Mr. Sandford's letter does not in the least clear up the matter."

"All the papers your uncle left are in that cabinet," Mr. Carstoe observes, pointing to a massive, ancient piece of furniture at the end of the room. You may like to look over them some time; I will get the keys and leave them with you. I know your cousin would like to have you—he and I searched them together. When you see Mr. Darrell you will find him prepared to be friendly and considerate."

Launce glances at the patronizing letter, and smiles again. Catching that smile, Mr. Carstoe wonders if Cromlin feels a certain bitterness toward Vaughan on account of his good fortune. It would be natural, he thinks, if it were so, but not in keeping with the idea he has gained of the young man's character. He thinks too what a pity it would be if enmity should grow up between the two, and would gladly do or say something to remove any angry feelings from Launce's mind.

"Very kindly in all ways your cousin spoke of you," he continues after a pause. "It seems hard, it really does, that your uncle did not live to make those changes in his will which I feel confident he intended."

"That he wanted to do it is enough for me," interrupts Launce, his face clearing. "I am not grudging Darrell his luck, Mr. Carstoe; don't think that."

"I am sure you are not!"

"You remain agent of all the property, I believe you told me," Launce says.

"Yes; your cousin's conduct has been most generous to me. I thought when I met with the last loss—the jewels, you remember—that there was nothing before me but worse drudgery than that of the past. His liberal

offers not only make me comfortable, but will enable me to lay by a fair competency for my old age—something more, if property in this region continues to increase in value as it has done for the last ten years."

"I am glad of it; very glad. I am sure you deserve success."

"You are very good to say so, Mr. Cromlin. At least I have worked and tried honestly; I can affirm so much in my own behalf. I could not, however, have hoped for such advantages as Mr. Vaughan has given me."

"A good salary—"

"More than that—per-centages upon lands that I sell or rent, and other means of saving. Had I been a relative instead of his uncle's man of business he could not have dealt more generously."

It is new in Launce's experience of his cousin to find him thinking of anybody besides himself. But he does not say this: his conscience suggests that perhaps he wrongs Darrell—has, without knowing it, cherished harsh thoughts and suspicions in regard to him. Launce has no mind to be on bad terms even in thought with his relative. Probably the course of their lives will not often run parallel, but Darrell is almost the only relation he has in

the world, and there shall be no ill-feeling on his side.

Mr. Carstoe disturbs his meditations by uttering aloud and abruptly those to which his own thoughts have wandered.

"There is another matter, Mr. Cromlin, that we may as well arrange now."

"What is that?"

"About the ten thousand dollars."

"Well, what about it?" Launce speaks quickly, and sits up with sudden erectness, and a brighter light in his eyes.

"It can be paid you at any time. Your cousin mentions in his letter to you that you have only to apply to me—he had made all the necessary arrangements for me to—"

"Excuse me," interrupts Launce, "we need not go into that matter, Mr. Carstoe. I have no intention of touching the money."

"Now really, on reflection, is it wise? Pardon my seeming to—"

"I understand; you are very kind, and I thank you. But there is nothing to be said, Mr. Carstoe. I do not want Vaughan's money, and I shall not take it."

"But it would be a gift from your late uncle."

"No; it would be Darrell's bounty that

gave it. I could not take it, and there is an end. If my uncle had lived to change matters, that would have been different. I cannot accept anything left me in that way. The business does not even admit of discussion."

"Well, you must be the judge, I suppose," sighs Carstoe.

"Yes; it is an affair of feeling, perhaps. Do believe that I meant what I said when I told you I did not grudge Darrell his fortune. If it were mine, I would give the whole just to clear up that dark business. I mean to find out by what means my uncle was so grossly deceived in regard to me."

"But that is of no consequence now. Your uncle was convinced. His letter to you—what he said to me—proves it."

"Yes; and it is a great comfort. Let the money go; I shall be able to earn all I need. But it is horrible to think that some wicked plot separated me so long from him; that is what hurts! I loved him better than I ever loved anybody; and to remember all these years, when he was in failing health, that I could not be with him—that—"

Launce breaks off, and turns his head. Mr. Carstoe is afraid that agitation may do him harm, and wants to get his thoughts away from

such painful meditations. He thinks what a fine thing it would be for Launce if he could only win Miss Crauford and the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, for Mr. Carstoe has struggled hard enough to know what money is worth.

"I—you—well, as you do me the honour to talk about your affairs, would it be a liberty if—"

"No liberty, whatever it may be; go on, Carstoe," says Launce, thinking how little one would expect to find so much delicacy and kind feeling as he has learned exists under that awkward, grim exterior.

"Only that I am sure your uncle's wishes would have weight—now it seems from the codicil that he desired you to try your chance—in short, did you ever happen to meet the young lady, Mr. Cromlin?"

Launce's thoughts have gone back to that brief meeting. He seems to see the beautiful face lying pale and helpless on his shoulder. His cheeks wear a tinge of colour, and his eyes soften as he answers,—"I saw Miss Crauford once; I am not acquainted with her."

Mr. Carstoe looks the other way, and rubs his hands softly together. He does not know much about romances, but it seems to him that

he has stumbled on a sort of idyl or poem, and he delights in it, little accustomed as he is to exercise his imagination. Launce perceives this; smiles, but not scornfully, at so odd a corner in this cold, legal mind, and, partly to please Mr. Carstoe, partly to gratify himself, he relates the incidents of that one meeting with Miss Crauford. He does not mention those after-dreams which have haunted him so persistently. Launce is not given to confidences. Mr. Carstoe listens attentively, and enjoys the story, and, in his silent fashion, reads Launce's face, and, middle-aged and toil-worn as he is, can construe its language as plainly as if the young man had put his pretty fancies into words.

"I gathered from what your cousin said, though I could not tell how," observes Mr. Carstoe, "that he had no mind to occupy himself with the possible results of the codicil; that, in fact, he had interests of a—a tender nature elsewhere."

Mr. Carstoe is almost as shy about pronouncing such words as an old maid would have been, in spite of his beard and his years.

"I know nothing about Darrell's affairs," Launce replies, and Mr. Carstoe feels that the subject is done with. But he would like

exceedingly to know how Miss Crauford looks, for the life of him he could not tell why. Mr. Carstoe has not read a novel in thirty years,—probably not more than three before that, say 'The Children of the Abbey' and 'Charlotte Temple' among them,—but he certainly has a latent taste for romance all the same.

"A bachelor's life is a lonely one," he says, making an attack on that unfortunate nose of his. "I think Mr. Vaughan found it so. I gathered too, from what he told me just before his last illness, that at one time he had been attached to this young lady's mother."

Launce is interested, but Mr. Carstoe has not much to tell, though Launce's youthful fancy has no difficulty in clothing the bare skeleton in glowing colours.

"There is a miniature in the cabinet too," says Mr. Carstoe. "I have an idea it was the portrait of Mrs. Crauford."

Launce is eager to see it: so Mr. Carstoe gets the keys, and opens the cabinet. Launce sits still in his chair: somehow he cannot find courage yet to look in the receptacle filled with mementoes of his dead uncle. Mr. Carstoe returns with a small velvet case in his hand, and gives it to Launce.

A painting on ivory, of a beautiful girl-face

— the very face he had once, for a few moments, studied so eagerly; only then the eyes were closed, and now they regard him with a sweet gravity. A name is written in pencil on the satin lining — Laura Marlow. Launce cannot remember how he knows, but he does, that this was the maiden name of Mr. Crauford's wife. He gazes at the portrait for some minutes in silence, and Mr. Carstoe gazes silently at him. As Launce looks up, he meets the other's glance, and both are slightly confused. Mr. Carstoe fears that he has been indiscreet, and Launce wonders if the vague, sweet fancies in his heart are visible upon his countenance.

"It would make a fine study for a picture," Launce says, carelessly laying the miniature on the table. "I should really like to keep it, but I suppose it is my cousin's property now."

"You could give it to him when you meet; there could be no impropriety certainly in your taking it," replies the other.

Launce suggests no further scruples; he puts the case quickly into his pocket, with a keen pleasure in the possession of that treasure, which he half feels to be folly, yet would not check if he were able.

Now Mr. Carstoe is obliged to go into the

town, and leave Launce to his own devices for the day. The hours do not drag: Launce can read a little, sleep a little; partake of the savoury messes Simpson the rigid serves up to tempt his palate, and dream a great deal, though in a vague fashion, of the possible future which may meet him beyond the seas. He shall soon be able now to undertake the voyage—very soon. It is odd, but among those delicious dreams, wherein Elizabeth Crauford's face makes the brightest radiance, slight thoughts of Darrell or his possible plans intrude.

The day has gone on to afternoon. Launce, in walking about the room, stops for an instant near the cabinet. He perceives that Mr. Carstoe has left the key in the lock—probably that, if so inclined, Launce may have an opportunity to look over his uncle's papers.

The young man sits down before the cabinet, opens the portion arranged as a desk, pulls out drawer after drawer, and examines the papers tied up in orderly packages. There is nothing of much importance, nothing of mystery or romance; yet he touches everything tenderly, and is moved and softened as memory after memory comes back of that dead man whom he so fondly loved. In one compartment he finds letters written by himself—letters labelled

in his uncle's hand, "From my boy." These have been preserved, even through those dark years of suspicion and anger. Launce is young enough to feel his eyelids grow moist, and man enough to be proud of the weakness. He looks over the letters—several written when he was a mere boy, others not long before the break between him and his relative. There are not many of them; just a few retained, as if, even in the height of his anger, the old man had not been able to deprive himself of reminiscences of what he once believed the youth actually to be.

Nothing to bear upon the strongest thought in his mind, however. Mr. Carstoe was right. Neither in pocket-books, notes, nor papers, is there the slightest allusion to that dark mystery. Probably in this life no light will ever be thrown upon it. What good could disclosure serve now? If he might know the exact means by which he had suffered that injury, the very hand which wrought it, what purpose could it further? There is no desire or idea of retribution or vengeance in Launce's mind; for the world he would not burden his soul with such a weight.

He lingers for a long time over the relics in the cabinet; commonplace ones enough, but

sacred to him from the affection he bore the dead man. He begins at length slowly to lay the papers back in their place, and to close the drawers and compartments.

One of the inner drawers does not shut entirely. Launce struggles with it somewhat—not that it is of any consequence, as it does not interfere with the closing of the portion arranged as a writing-desk, inside which it is situated. At another time he would not have noticed—he might have examined the cabinet often without doing so—but in his softened mood he regarded with almost morbid tenderness everything his uncle's hand had touched so near the last conscious hours of his life.

The drawer will not shut, so he tries to pull it out, that he may discover the reason. But the drawer is no more inclined to come out than to go in—an obstinate, pig-headed drawer as ever an old carved cabinet owned in its interior. Launce tugs with such strength as he possesses, and the drawer squeaks in querulous resentment, but is at length obliged to yield. It flies out with such force, that Launce in his still weak state is fairly thrown backward in his chair.

He sees now what held the drawer—the cover of a book, the leaves hanging down behind out of sight. Launce pulls the volume forth and

looks at it. A thin blank book, with pages of writing here and there—a journal, broken and disconnected, kept by his uncle during the last months of his life—one little entry on the very day of his fatal seizure.

Launce does not clearly understand, he retreats in horror from the suspicions which strike his mind. He does not want them cleared up! If Milady were here before him, ready to answer any questions he could ask, Launce feels that he should fly from her presence. O, let the secret rest!

CHAPTER II.

PLATO'S DISCIPLE.

MR. CRAUFORD fell ill. For years he had considered himself an invalid, constantly prophesying untold suffering and speedy death as his portion; but hitherto the former had refused to have much to do with him, and the latter showed no inclination to shorten his mortal span. Now among the soft Italian spring-days Mr. Crauford caught a low fever. At first the malady promised to be of little consequence, not grave enough to alarm even his daughter, accustomed to see him take to his bed on the slightest provocation. But the days went on—grew into a fortnight. Elizabeth became very anxious, and the doctors were forced to acknowledge that the disease proved more deeply-seated and obstinate than they had anticipated.

One never can predicate, from previous knowledge of any human being, how he will support an illness serious enough to suggest to his mind the possibility of a not distant departure from

this mundane sphere. Mr. Crauford had always been the most nervous and captious patient that ever tried a physician's good temper, but from the beginning of this attack he exhibited a fortitude which caused the doctors, previously unacquainted with him, to regard his character as one of unusual force and self-control. The truth was, Mr. Crauford had seized the occasion to become a hero in his own eyes. I suppose at the bottom he did not really believe himself about to die, but he thought he believed it, and his inordinate vanity and craving for admiration, added to a feeling that this critical state rendered him an object of interest and importance, caused him to enact a kind of ancient stoicism quite wonderful to witness.

Vaughan had been absent on one of the little excursions wherewith he diversified the quiet of his present life, but he returned as soon as he heard of Mr. Crauford's illness. He trusted that chance, or the lucky star which had thus far ruled his destiny, would bring to a fortunate conclusion this period of suspense fraught with such dangerous possibilities. He proved the kindest of friends to Elizabeth in her trouble, and the most patient of nurses to the sick man. Mr. Crauford was more submissive to him than he had ever been to any living creature, and

Elizabeth quickly acquired the habit of leaning upon his advice and consolations, reproaching herself for not having hitherto esteemed the gentleness of his nature as it deserved.

Mr. Crauford's illness, and above all the state of high mental grandeur into which he saw fit to soar, afforded Vaughan the opportunity that neither his craft nor good fortune had been able to bring near.

He strengthened the physicians in their view of the sick man's temperament, and when they admitted that the disease proved more serious than they had expected, though still perfectly hopeful as to its ultimate results, Vaughan at once opened his batteries. There were grave interests affecting the whole fortune of this gentleman's daughter, which ought to be definitely arranged. Mr. Crauford was, as they saw, a person of unusual coolness and fortitude, but if later he became enfeebled in mind and nerves, his anxiety would go far towards preventing his recovery. The physicians acknowledged this, and advised Vaughan to encourage Mr. Crauford in setting straight any matter important enough to cause him uneasiness. There certainly was a great lack of vitality. While anticipating his recovery from this attack, they could not deny that a future illness might

be less successfully combatted, and at his age it was best that all business connected with his daughter's well-being should be arranged. Of course he must not be agitated; but from what they could judge of the patient's character, Mr. Vaughan's certainty that such a course would be the surest means of preserving the tranquillity of spirit so necessary seemed to them correct.

After the physicians had gone, Darrell sat meditating until disturbed by the entrance of Gervais: the sick man desired his presence.

Mr. Crauford was very Roman indeed this morning. He had a copy of Plato lying on the bed-cover; he could see his face in the mirror, and he fancied that he must look very much as Cato or Cicero did when stricken by disease, and was determined to render these closing scenes of his earthly pilgrimage as impressive as possible. An under-current of thought which went on in his mind concerning the feasibility of a voyage to Greece the following autumn, might have suggested to an unprejudiced person a doubt as to the depth of his belief in that speedy departure of which, for days past, he had talked in grand phrases; but Mr. Crauford's admiration of his own mental

strength was disturbed by no such humiliating consciousness.

He would have liked to rise, wrap his dressing-gown about him in toga-like folds, and so appear more Ciceronian, and he regretted the years had not left him bald, that after his decease a correct cast might be taken of his wonderful head. But he was too weak to sit up, and he could not bring himself to sacrifice the still luxuriant locks of which he was exceedingly vain. So he stretched one hand out upon the copy of Plato, and extended the other towards Vaughan as he entered, and did his best to offer the appearance of an ancient Consul reposing in the curule chair.

"What I want," said Mr. Crauford, as the visitor seated himself by the bed, "is frankness. That the medical men have come to a decision in regard to my state I know—it is only fitting that I should be made acquainted with it."

"I think so myself," Vaughan replied. "With ordinary invalids the less they know about themselves the better; but with your marvellous firmness and clear-sightedness, it would be simply an insult to your great mental powers to treat you in this way."

These words were as honey and manna to

the listener's soul. Nobody had ever flattered him so outrageously, and in consequence he believed that next to himself Vaughan was the most remarkable personage of the century—falling a long way behind his own rank of course, but still coming next.

"I am a dying man, my young friend," said he; "you and I know it—to minds like ours the thought is free from those terrors which cause weaker souls to shrink."

"At least I fear that you are very, very ill," Vaughan replied gently.

Mr. Crauford had elevated Plato in his hand while uttering that fine sentiment, but at Darrell's response he let the heathen philosopher fall with a crash.

"Eh—what! Have the doctors—they don't think—" he began more eagerly than was in keeping with his assumption of the Ciceronian style.

"They are hopeful—confident of the favourable result finally," Vaughan hastened to add.

Mr. Crauford recovered his dignified composure, and signed Vaughan to pick up the heathen.

"Plato grows too heavy for my frail hands," he said, with a self-compassionate smile. "My young friend, the doctors deceive themselves,

or they deem it wise to deceive me—not easy, not easy to do."

Vaughan paid a neat tribute of admiration to his perspicacity, and noble powers in general, then continued,—

"While differing from your opinion of your state, I hold with our great man yonder"—pointing to Plato, as if he made a third in the interview—"that it is always a proof of wisdom to have one's worldly affairs as carefully arranged as if one expected to set out immediately upon that journey into the unknown."

"The very thing of which I wished to speak," Mr. Crauford said. He had not thought of speaking of anything of that nature, but he now believed it was with some such purpose he had sent for the young man. He tried to think of any affair of importance which ought to be arranged, but his money matters were all in perfect order; so the only thing which suggested itself was in regard to those masses of fragments he fondly believed poems. He seized with avidity upon this new idea.

"I leave my work unfinished," he pursued; "but there is much which in careful hands might be given to the world. That must be your duty, Vaughan."

Darrell laughed internally at the idea of his ever meddling with those chaotic heaps of weak rhymes and stolen fancies, as he replied,—

"If it were to prove necessary, of course the task would be my delight; but, my dear sir, you will live to do it yourself."

Mr. Crauford shook his head at the possibility, looking rather puzzled to discover what important business could still remain, as it was evidently not of the manuscripts he had been thinking. Something urgent had been in his mind since he had sent for Vaughan to speak of it; but what? Darrell saw his perplexity, and was prepared to clear away the mists.

"That part in any case we may consider settled," he said; "but I know what from the first has disturbed you—the thought of your daughter."

"Yes, yes," Mr. Crauford answered, immensely relieved to find out what care had oppressed him. Of course it was about Elizabeth he had intended to speak; but what had he meant to say? "A father's heart, Vaughan; a father's heart!"

"I can judge a little from my own—a lover's feelings," Vaughan said, laying his hand on the sick man's, while his face softened with

that smile which made it seem so earnest and noble. "At least she would have always one faithful affection in which to trust. I know you were thinking that too."

Of course. Still Mr. Crauford was no nearer the light.

"I think I have read clearly what has been in your mind," continued Vaughan; "my love for Elizabeth, my veneration for you, make me clear-sighted. But why should you leave yourself room for anxiety? I myself believe that, ill as you are, you will recover—"

"No!" interrupted Mr. Crauford; "no!" And he held up Plato again, as if the Grecian's spirit had revealed the future to his eyes.

"Then, believing that, why, as I said, leave room for care?" said Darrell. "I know you have been asking yourself that question also. Will you let me try to answer?"

"Try; I will listen," replied Mr. Crauford, glad so easily to find out what interrogatory he had been putting to his soul.

"You both believe in my earnest affection," Vaughan went on. "Elizabeth's answer to my plea was virtually a consent—she only asked for time. In urging her to marry me at once—as I think has suggested itself to you in viewing the matter from every side, after your

habit—you leave your mind completely at rest—"

Mr. Crauford broke in with some hasty exclamation. He seized on this new excitement as joyfully as he had accepted his *rôle* of Stoic. There was no doubt whatever in his mind that he had been pondering the very thing Vaughan put into words. Mr. Crauford's inner vision contemplated a hurried picture of a marriage by a death-bed, himself, Ciceronian to the last, bestowing his farewell blessing on his child and her new-made husband—something white and grand floating off over their heads directly after—his departing soul probably. He was charmed with the tableau; it was very real, and yet perfectly destitute of painful reality. It is not easy to explain the jumble his faculties made of the business. He contemplated doing a fine death scene, but for all that he did not see himself actually dead and cold. He could consider a voyage to Athens in the same breath; but he was dying, he knew he believed that. Let him bless his daughter and her husband before he soared off to join Plato and other kindred natures in a higher sphere.

The two conversed for a long time. When Vaughan ceased talking, there was no misti-

ness nor uncertainty in Mr. Crauford's mind. He was perfectly satisfied that since the beginning of his illness he had been brooding these weighty matters; that he had sent for Darrell to unfold his wishes; that every suggestion had come from himself; that the young man's share consisted simply in agreeing to his decision.

He wanted Elizabeth summoned; he was wild to have his project carried into effect. Vaughan himself hurried in search of her.

"I have been waiting for you ever since the doctors went away," she began. "Gervais said you were with my father. I know it annoys him sometimes if one interrupts a conversation, so I stayed here. Tell me what the physicians say this morning."

She was very anxious, very beautiful in her anxiety; it was a great comfort to his æsthetic sense that she did not make her nose red, nor sniff, nor display trouble in a disagreeable manner.

He did not spare her. He seemed to be breaking the verdict gently; but he let her believe that the doctors were very doubtful how the illness might end. He liked to console her in her grief; she was picturesque and stately still, troubled and shocked as she was,

so he enjoyed the interview. He proved so tender, so kind, how could she help trusting him—help believing that he was noble, and earnest, and true as some chivalrous Paladin of old?

But her father wanted her; she must wipe away her tears, and be composed and brave. Vaughan warned her that, above all things, perfect tranquillity must be preserved in his presence — no wish or idea thwarted. She should hear the truth! It would be useless to question the doctors — even if the sick man grew worse, they would consider it a duty to deceive her; but from her friend she might rest assured she would meet entire frankness, however painful the effort.

She was so utterly alone in the world, this visionary, enthusiastic creature; under all her dignity and pride she had such a tender, loving heart—she so craved affection, some superior strength upon which she could repose in complete confidence. She had never in her life been thrown into such intimate companionship with any man—never seen one who comprehended her dreams and aspirations—one whose own plan of life was so marked and broad, so replete with noble aims and determinations.

He was gentle and tender too; the softest

woman could not have been more kind and sympathetic than he proved in her affliction. No wonder she clung to him—believed in him wholly—felt humiliated in her own esteem that at first she had not rated his goodness so highly as it deserved.

She went away to her father, and that modern version of the antique was at once so pathetic and sublime over the speedy cessation of his mortal sufferings, that, unnerved by sleepless nights and watchings, more than ever alarmed by Vaughan's apparent fears, Elizabeth lost the last trace of courage, or even ability to reason, and almost believed that her father was positively dying before her eyes.

He managed to make his whole meaning clear—the plan which he was convinced he had unfolded to Vaughan. Elizabeth was too weak and shaken for any exhibition of the control and decision natural to her; she could only cry out, as the weakest girl might have done,—

"I cannot—I cannot! It is too sudden—I cannot!"

Then Mr. Crauford rushed into a violent excitement, and Elizabeth remembered Vaughan's warning—the consequence might prove fatal. She could only try to soothe him by loving

words; but he was as obstinate as ever in his weak, inconsequent way, and got speedily back to the idea which had thoroughly taken possession of his mind.

Elizabeth could not deny that this man was more to her than any other had ever been; indeed, these last days had almost convinced her that she loved him; but the haste was abhorrent to her—the idea of a marriage under such circumstances in every way distasteful.

"I could not die in peace remembering that I left my child helpless, alone in the world," Mr. Crauford said over and over, as if he were about to leave a small orphan of ten years penniless on the earth.

Indeed, Elizabeth felt desolate enough, but she could combat this.

"If it were to happen—but it will not—O it will not—I should not be alone; there is my Aunt Janet—I could go to her."

"Think of the journey; and Janet is an old woman—an impossible old woman," moaned Mr. Crauford. "You could not live with her—nobody could! I tell you, Elizabeth, I could not rest in my grave to leave you so; and you care for Vaughan—you would have married him in a few months; why not a little sooner, if it will please your father? I shall not

have many more favours to ask at your hands."

"Ah, papa, dear papa, don't speak like that!"

She knelt by the bed and tried to comfort him, but Mr. Crauford would not be comforted; he would moan and shake, and forget his Roman firmness, and terrify her half out of her senses by his looks and conduct.

That night Mr. Crauford was worse. Vaughan had stayed at the house, and as Elizabeth was completely exhausted, he persuaded her to go to rest. In the middle of the night the sick man was seized with a kind of nervous spasm, and wanted his daughter. Darrell had no objection to her being alarmed by his appearance, though perfectly certain the crisis was not a dangerous one.

Poor Elizabeth could only feel that she was to blame. Had she gratified her father instead of opposing him, the attack would not have taken place. She felt terribly guilty and wicked, but she retained composure enough to go on doing whatever she could, so white and ghastly that a heart of stone might have pitied her despair; but Vaughan never offered a word of hope: he was tender, kind, but he allowed her to see that he was sorely alarmed.

Toward morning the *crise* yielded to the physician's remedies. Mr. Crauford slept, and was perhaps no worse on the following day, though certainly somewhat weakened. At all events, his desire to urge forward the marriage was as strong as ever; Vaughan took care there should be no falling off in that respect; and having all his life been the most changeable and capricious of men on every subject, great or small, submitted to his decision, it was wonderful to see how Darrell's influence held him firm here.

Later in the day Vaughan comes into the great room where Elizabeth sits alone in the shadow—comes so softly that she does not hear his step,—is only roused from her confused reverie by his voice calling softly,—

"Elizabeth, Elizabeth!"

There is a tone of inquiry in the passionate utterance which she comprehends; it asks the question she had been vainly trying to answer during her troubled meditation. She looks up with a start, trembling at the light in his eyes, the eagerness in his voice.

"Do not be afraid," he says sadly. "Think of me only as your best, your truest friend."

"I will—I do," she answers.

"Will you listen to me? Will you let me

tell you what seems to me right, Elizabeth?"

She knows that his wise counsels and tender words are to be added to her father's persistence. She knows too — unable to decide whether the tumult in her soul is fear or some softer emotion—that circumstances, or fate, are too potent for her will. Indeed, her power of judging seems gone now that a dread of clouding her father's last earthly days is added to the balance against her unreasoning hesitation. He must judge for her—this hero, this brave, earnest man, who has shown himself as gentle and loving as he is strong.

So it comes about that one evening, weeks after we last saw Launce Cromlin, Mr. Carstoe returns home, and brings the latest New York papers to amuse his guest: for, in spite of his desire to be gone, Launce is still a prisoner. Some slight imprudence or exposure—perhaps some mental agitation, which the doctor has not taken into account—caused a relapse, from which he is only now recovered.

But this time he is radically better—quite strong, in fact; and the day of his departure is set, sorely to the chagrin of Mr. Carstoe and Simpson. Indeed, the fiery-haired is utterly disconsolate at losing her occupation of the

last months, and visits her grief so heavily on the heads of all about, that Launce laughingly tells Mr. Carstoe he will be obliged to advertise for a troublesome invalid, whom Mrs. Simpson can spoil and tyrannize over to her heart's content.

While the agent has gone away to consult that despotic female sovereign in regard to some household arrangement, Launce opens the newspapers, and idly turns the pages.

He comes upon a gossiping letter from an Italian correspondent; and as anything concerning Italy always possesses a charm, he reads on and on, and at last reads an account of a marriage which took place in Pisa the very day this epistle was penned. The bride mentioned is Elizabeth Crauford, and she has wedded Launce's cousin, Darrell Vaughan.

One thing and another detain Mr. Carstoe, so that it is deep in the twilight when he re-enters the library. Launce sits there in the gloom, his head resting in his hand, his eyes gazing abstractedly towards the western sky, along which a single line of yellow light still lingers.

Twice Mr. Carstoe speaks before the young man hears; then he rouses himself, and is composed and cheerful. Before they part for

the night he gives his companion a pleasurable surprise.

"You will think me a very capricious fellow," he says, "but I have changed my mind. I shall not go East this year. I have decided to follow your advice. I may never get to California again, so I shall visit the wonderful mountain scenery before I return, and perhaps paint a picture or two. I have been idle too long."

Darrell Vaughan has won in every way. He has won—whether honestly or not matters little to Launce. What does matter, is the loss of the beautiful dream which has been with him during many weary months. He marvels somewhat at his own weakness, at the hold which so baseless a vision has taken upon his soul, but neither astonishment nor indignation at his own boyishness changes the fact.

The truth remains—Launce has lost a hope so precious and fair, that life looks dull indeed deprived of its radiance.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER TWO YEARS.

PAGES of pretty poetry have been written upon the misery women suffer from seeing their idols turn into common clay. The poetry is nice to read, but no fate can be more galling, more replete with daily and hourly suffering, than that of the woman who has such an experience forced upon her, if said idol chances to be her husband. The worst feature in the case is that there remains no tinge of romance, no æsthetic glow which would at least fling a certain dignity about the trouble. Most women could pardon a great crime free from selfish meanness, or have the consolation of regarding the perpetrator as a kind of fallen angel, still glorious in a Lucifer-like way at least; but what flings the oracle off his pedestal is, to find him full of small vices, heartless, regardless of others—all his brilliant theories mere words, his whole life a sham.

Elizabeth Crauford had been two years a

wife—years over whose details I must pass almost in silence, since slight as many of them would seem, I should need my whole volume to chronicle their course.

The autumn after their return to America, Vaughan received a nomination for Congress. The contest was very sharp, and he encountered defeat—his first failure. Just after that, he was preparing to address some great meeting. The speech would require much care, must be in every way a brilliant effort. Elizabeth had gone one night to a party; Darrell was too busy to spare the time, but had insisted on her accepting the invitation.

It was very late when she returned; Vaughan had not yet come upstairs. She dismissed her maid, and sat for awhile waiting his appearance. Three o'clock struck at length; it seemed wrong for him thus to spend the whole night in labour, as he had not been well for several days. She was afraid of annoying him by intruding into his study, still she could not make up her mind to go to bed without warning him of the hour. She stole downstairs in her dressing-gown, and knocked at his door. There was no answer. Thrice she knocked; then, growing almost alarmed, turned the knob. The door was locked.

He might have fallen asleep. She tried to think that; all the same, she could not subdue the anxiety which troubled her. She remembered a staircase leading from his dressing-room to the study—a staircase reserved entirely for his own use—possibly she might gain admittance in that way. She hurried back upstairs, through a sleeping chamber, into this apartment, and on down the stairs.

The fear of vexing him—she had already learned that it was always well to avoid the possibility—caused her to pause even when she reached the lower door. She knocked several times; there was no answer—no sound. She opened the door, and entered. The fire had died out in the grate; the room felt cold and chill. She saw Darrell lying back in his easy-chair, the table strewn with pages of manuscript.

She called his name. No response followed.

"Poor fellow," was her thought, "he is completely worn out! I must wake him; I am sure he will not be vexed."

She went up to him, and laid her hand on his shoulder. He did not stir. She shook his arm, calling again. He might have been dead for any show of life he evinced. Now she looked closely at him; the eyes were partially

open, blank, unseeing; the muscles of the face drawn and rigid. She lifted his hand, it was cold; as she released it in terror, the arm fell back supine and nerveless. She was thoroughly frightened; she turned to ring the bell; she must waken somebody—must have assistance. As she moved, the loose sleeve of her robe swept the papers upon the floor; some heavier object fell too with a dull metallic ring. She stooped and picked up a little silver box, opened it, and saw a mass of greenish substance, which she recognized.

Her husband's secret was clear now. She had known for months that he had a secret. She understood the odd manner which had several times puzzled her—the incoherent conversation, the strangeness of voice and look. Vaughan sought his inspiration in hasheesh.

Elizabeth gathered the papers together, glancing over them as she did so. A few pages of a speech—a brilliant opening—after that, paragraphs more hastily written, but full of force; then sentences unfinished; then mere broken words. There lay the pen on his knee: it had fallen from his hand as he sank back completely overcome by the effects of the poisonous drug.

Elizabeth was familiar with the workings of

the potion: she comprehended that he had taken an over-dose, and that, after quickening his faculties for a brief space, this death-like lethargy had come upon him. She could not tell if he were conscious of her presence, but she fancied not. It was useless to attempt to rouse him; indeed, it might be unsafe.

She stood there, white as a ghost, and looked down at him. Across the pain and trouble which disturbed her features swept an expression that was almost loathing and contempt. In these brief instants she decided upon her line of conduct. Expostulation would be useless—worse; it would form an element of actual discord and disunion.

The day which had witnessed Vaughan's political defeat showed his wife a new phase of that complex character she was studying too rapidly for her own peace. He had, for the first time, given free rein to his temper; twice before she had been shocked by a perception of the fierce capabilities hidden under that polished exterior; but this time there was no attempt at self-restraint, and the brunt of his fury fell upon her. Some word intended to be kind and consolatory—some suggestion which piqued his self-love or obstinacy—out burst the storm, and a mad one it was.

Without a word Elizabeth had turned and left the room, but the one look of haughty scorn which flashed on him was a reproof Darrell Vaughan would never forget nor forgive. When he came to his senses, he was able to put by for a space the recollection of that glance; but it would return. As yet the spell of her beauty still possessed its influence. He cared for her in his material, passionate fashion, so he made his peace. Elizabeth would have shrunk from excuses put into language, would have disliked that he should thus humiliate himself, so she accepted his tacit repentance at once.

She thought of all this now as she stood looking at his pale, distorted face, from which the fire and energy had gone out. The mask had lifted; the real man was there—coarse, brutal, sensual—all his glorious theories, the pretences which had hitherto ennobled his countenance in her eyes as they had done his life in her esteem, gone utterly.

She crept away to her chamber and left him there alone. She would keep his secret; no perception that she had penetrated it should come up to anger or disturb him.

Day broke; the chill, grey dawn stole in through the curtains and startled her like some

importunate watcher of her misery. It had been a terrible vigil; a communing with her own soul, a study of the future, full of import to a character like Elizabeth's.

At last she heard her husband's step on the stairs. She closed the door into his dressing-room, put out the lights, and got into bed. He had the habit when he worked or came home late of sleeping in a chamber the other side of the hall. She heard him enter that now.

They met at luncheon. He was listless, weak, and miserable. Labour was an impossibility, yet the speech must be finished; on the evening of the following day it was to be delivered. He had sent for her to his study to ask some question in regard to a matter he had entrusted to her care. His petulance and nervousness he was quite unable to conceal, and he told her frankly that he found himself completely upset and his work not half done.

"Perhaps I can help you," she said. "I see you have copious notes there; at least I might arrange them for you to elaborate."

He hated the idea of receiving such assistance, but the position was a critical one. Elizabeth sat down at the table, and toiled over the fragments of the address. She not only put them in order, but she elaborated them

herself, spending the whole day and almost the whole night over the address. He took it then, and roused himself to read and alter. In truth, he delivered the speech as she wrote it, but he did not admit this, and he almost hated her that he was compelled not only thus to recognize her powers, but to use them in his own behalf.

When they had been married a year, Mr. Crauford returned from Europe, and very soon after his arrival died quite suddenly. To the last the old faith in his son-in-law remained undisturbed. His fortune he left entirely at Vaughan's disposal. Darrell was now a very wealthy man. Only an inconsiderable portion of Elizabeth's own property had been secured to her; the wedding was too hurried and Mr. Crauford too indolent to think of such matters. A part of her mother's fortune descended to her in a way which kept it independent of the man she married. She found herself fettered and hampered. Her schemes for doing good met with no sympathy from Vaughan save when they could serve to cast a lustre about him and redound to his credit. During the early days, while he still maintained a show of sympathy, excuses and reasons were offered. At length she heard plainly that she was going out of her province; meddling with affairs which did not

belong to her; trying for notoriety as a philanthropist in a manner he deemed unbecoming.

This taunt was a hard blow, but she bore it. I do not mean that she was a model of patience —she often rebelled, flamed into anger—but she shrank from contention; harsh words hurt her like blows, and the idea of quarrelling with her husband filled her with horror—any submission was better than that.

Up in one of the northern counties was a small estate, which had been a part of Mrs. Crauford's marriage portion, but not among the property she owned independent of her husband. It was a place both father and daughter held in love and reverence. It had been Mrs. Crauford's favourite residence. She had beautified the house, embellished the grounds, spent years in the task. She was an admirable artist; the walls of several of the rooms were wainscoted with wood, and the panels painted by her own hands in landscape and figures. On a hill at the back of the grounds Mrs. Crauford was buried: they made the husband's grave beside her.

Twelvemonths after Mr. Crauford's death a new railway was projected which would pass near this country seat. The company offered Vaughan an exorbitant price for the place. A

cutting through the hill where the graves were would lessen almost by millions the expense of building the road, and the other lands were admirably situated for the site of certain factories they proposed to erect.

Darrell had gradually acquired the habit of accepting his wife's services in his literary labours and the immense correspondence which his political life forced upon him. Elizabeth was glad to be of use; she never shirked her tasks nor complained of fatigue, and he did not spare her. To himself he would not have admitted that she did any work beyond the skill of an ordinary amanuensis, but in all ways she was like a quicker, more comprehensive portion of his own intellect,—able sometimes to seize and make palpable thoughts which only vexed him by their vagueness. He refused to acknowledge this truth to his own consciousness, but he felt it, and the knowledge kept up a constant *sourde* irritation in his mind.

So it happened that the first news of the company's proposition reached Elizabeth herself. She was opening and reading aloud letters; she came upon this; glanced at the commencement, and flung the sheet down with an expression of horror.

"What is the matter?" Vaughan asked.

"It is too dreadful—I cannot read it!" she exclaimed, putting the letter into his hands.

While he read she turned away to a window, trying to subdue the thrill of indignation and grief which shook her. It was an actual insult and desecration offered to her dead, this vile proposal.

Vaughan read the letter through, folded it up, and laid it on his table. Surprised by his silence, she looked back, her features still quivering, her eyes bright with tears.

"Let me answer it at once," she said.

"Don't think any more about it," Vaughan replied; "I will attend to it."

"But did you ever hear of a proposal so absolutely base and revolting?" she demanded.

"My dear Queenie," he said, calling her by that pet name, after a habit he had when wishing to be particularly kind or tender, "business men have not leisure for sentiment."

"At least they might be human," returned she. "To propose carrying their road through a burial-place—it has been consecrated—"

"Very likely they knew nothing about the graves being there," he observed, as she stopped, half suffocated by emotion. "Don't think about it—there is no use."

"You will answer at once, Darrell?"

"Of course! Come, you are upset by this: dress yourself and go out. I can't have you worried by those beasts' stupidity."

He came up to her, passed his arm about her waist, kissed her forehead with a gentleness which was growing rare of late. She felt grateful for his sympathy, and, with her usual consideration, forebore to trouble him by any further display of emotion.

She went out to drive, paid several visits, and all the morning was thinking that during the past weeks a change for the better had come over their lives. Only once since her father's death had she discovered any trace of Vaughan's having yielded to the fatal fascinations of the poison. No hint of her knowledge had passed her lips: she could not be certain whether he suspected that she had gained the clue to his secret.

To-day she felt more hopeful than she had done for months. It was much to her that Darrell accepted her assistance: she was utterly incapable of such self-gratulation and complacency as he imputed to her in his thoughts. She did not in the least realize what his growing literary success, his efforts as an orator owed to her patient toil and her clear, luminous intellect. She laboured without selfish feeling,

and would have been more astonished than the world had she perceived the full extent of her part. If she thought at all, it was only that Vaughan, like many men, was too impatient and excitable to work out and elaborate his own brilliant fancies or clear reasonings; she was blessed with a kind of faculty (she did not dream of calling it talent) to understand these, and an ability under his directions to put them in the shape requisite for others' comprehension.

She had been trying of late to lay by her forebodings in regard to their future; her perception of her husband's faults; her consciousness that, glitter as it might, his course was animated by motives very different from those noble aims of which he had talked so glowingly during the days of their acquaintance in Italy.

She reproached herself with having been guilty of too harsh judgments, when she perceived that this hero whom she had mounted upon so lofty a pedestal was only human after all. That he had grave faults, inexplicable contradictions of character, even startling weaknesses, was no reason why she should dare to rise up in condemnation, without waiting to discover whether he meant to struggle against these temptations. She told herself that she had thus armed her soul in the first shock of

disappointment, and now she was obliged to admit that he did strive against his inner foes; his conduct of late enabled her to believe this. She exulted at this proof of his strength, and blamed herself more severely than another could have done.

Gradually he would outgrow his faults; ambition would limit itself to rightful bounds; this love of wealth be kept from warping and blighting his character; his temper fought down and conquered.

He could not be a sham—a pretence. He must believe in his own aims, and he would press on toward their realization.

More than ever she was thinking these things to-day. Life looked brighter to her than it had done for a long time. Not content with doing her husband full justice in her esteem, she would have him reinstated in her heart—that proud heart which required the object of its affection to be lofty and pure, or risk awakening an estrangement, a terrible shrinking at once physical and mental, which would turn her very soul to stone, or wear out body and spirit rapidly in the contest.

Days passed. Vaughan was in the most sunny of his moods—careful, tender—fairly like the worshipper who had wooed her under Italian

skies, and been at once lover and friend. Success had come to every undertaking during the past weeks. His name was to be brought up again as a Congressional candidate, and this time triumph was certain, for he had resumed his relations with the municipal party, at once the most powerful and corrupt that the annals of our history could furnish. He concealed the fact of this coalition from his wife as carefully as he did from the world at large, and managed so well, that not a suspicion was roused in the minds of honourable men who were among his supporters. The municipal leaders were as anxious as he that no inkling of the truth should escape. Sundry schemes, which they hoped by his assistance to carry through Congress, would be much surer of success if entire secrecy were preserved as to their electioneering efforts in his behalf.

A fortnight elapsed. Vaughan left home suddenly; he told Elizabeth that business called him to Albany—he might be absent three or four days.

The second morning after his departure Elizabeth was seized with a desire to visit Northcots, the place where her parents were buried. She had only been there a few times since her return from Europe. Vaughan owned

a country seat in another county, and one excuse or another on his part had kept her away from Northcots, the real reason being that he had conceived a strong dislike to the pretty spot.

She would take Margot and go up there for the day and night. An old servant of her mother's had always lived at the house and kept it in order. It would be a sad pleasure to have a day of quiet memories in the haunt where so much of her childhood was spent. She had been dreaming too all night of her mother—odd, perplexing dreams; pleasant at first, changing suddenly to dark, painful visions. She woke depressed and absurdly anxious; it would do her good to visit the place.

It was still very early when she summoned Margot and announced her determination. They were in ample time for the morning boat, and it was a pleasant sail of a few hours up the beautiful river, with the landscape on either hand brightening into the glory of spring.

They left the boat and drove off among the hills for another hour, to the quiet hamlet near which Northcots lay.

The carriage reached the entrance to the grounds. The gates stood open; they passed

through. Elizabeth was leaning back in her seat, forgetful of her dismal fancies of the night, when Margot, with her head out of the window, muttered a surprised exclamation.

"What is the matter?" her mistress inquired.

The Frenchwoman turned upon her a face utterly blank with astonishment. There was no time for further words; the carriage had halted on the lawn.

"Why do you stop here?" Elizabeth asked, as the coachman appeared at the door. "And you are driving over the grass. What do you mean?"

"I couldn't get along the road, ma'am," he answered; "and 'taint much matter about the grass now."

He stepped back, and she descended from the vehicle, looked up, and stood transfixed with horror. The sward was littered with furniture, men were bringing out of the house great panels of wood, and putting them in boxes which were placed on the verandah. The grass had been ruthlessly trampled, the early flowers trodden down.

Elizabeth grew so white that Margot, who had reached her side, called out in terror. Her voice roused Mrs. Vaughan; she moved

forward across the lawn, and entered the house.

"What are you doing—what does this mean?" she asked one of the men busy over the boxes.

As she spoke she saw that they were packing the painted panels. The man she addressed was a mechanic from the village, who knew her by sight.

"It 's just the masther's orders, av ye plaze, ma'am," he answered.

Elizabeth felt dizzy and faint. There was a sense of unreality about the whole thing too; it was like the continuation of her evil dreams. She could scarcely persuade herself but that in another moment she should wake and find herself leagues away from the spot.

"Where is Mrs. Anderson?" she inquired.

"Faith, ma'am, it 's me belafe she 's keenin' in the kitchen," returned the Irishman, staring at her in open-mouthed surprise.

Elizabeth hurried past him, down the corridor, catching glimpses of dismantled rooms as she hastened on—still feeling that it must all be a hideous dream; another moment and she should wake.

On through a back passage without meeting any one—into the kitchen, usually a model of

neatness; but the same disorder reigned here as in the other parts of the house.

"Mrs. Anderson," called Elizabeth.

"Who is it—what do you want?" returned a voice from a porch off the kitchen.

Elizabeth passed out; at the further end of the verandah stood Mrs. Anderson, with her sleeves rolled up, her cap awry. She was packing all sorts of kitchen utensils, and crying heartily as she worked. At sight of her young mistress she uttered one scream, half pain, half wrath, dropped a pile of plates with an awful crash, and sat flat down on the floor, covering her face with her apron, and sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Are you all crazy!" exclaimed Mrs. Vaughan. "Get up this minute, Prudence, and tell me what it means."

Mrs. Anderson only held her apron more closely over her head, rocked herself to and fro, and moaned,—

"I'd never ha' believed it of you, Miss Elizabeth—O Miss Elizabeth! The place she loved so—and never even to give me any warning—O, it has broke my heart—broke my heart!"

"Prudence!" called Elizabeth again, going towards the old woman, her voice grown sud-

denly tremulous and weak,—"Get up, for Heaven's sake get up, and tell me what has happened."

The housekeeper quickly drew the apron from her face, stared for one instant in wonder at the pale countenance which met her gaze, and gasped,—

"I don't believe she did it—I don't believe she knowed a word!"

"Knew what?" repeated Elizabeth. "Get up—tell me—tell me."

"Don't you know it's sold?" demanded the old woman, rising.

"Sold—what is sold?"

"The hull place—the very graves out on the hill side!" cried Prudence. "O, Miss Elizabeth, say you didn't do it—say you didn't!"

A mist gathered before Elizabeth's eyes; the woman seemed suddenly retreating to a great distance; the verandah heaved under her feet, and a roaring like a sea deafened her—then everything was a blank.

CHAPTER IV.

NORTHCOTS.

When Elizabeth came to her senses, she was seated in a chair, her bonnet off; Mrs. Anderson and Margot were bathing her forehead, holding hartshorn to her nose, and talking incoherently in their respective languages.

"Miss Elizabeth, Miss Elizabeth!" moaned Prudence. "Laud's sake, she's jist like dead!"

Margot's voice rose shriller still. The noise was insupportable to Mrs. Vaughan.

"Don't!" she said feebly, holding up her hand. "Give me some water."

Prudence put a glass to her lips; Elizabeth managed to drink.

"Madame is better!" cried Margot.

"Yes, yes," Elizabeth answered slowly. "Go away for a few minutes, Margot—I want to speak with Mrs. Anderson."

"O deary me, O deary me!" groaned Prudence. "She didn't know—she didn't know; I said at first she didn't."

"Did you say the place was sold?" Elizabeth asked. "I could not have heard that—you did not say so, Prudence!"

"O Laud's sake, O mercy on us!" sobbed the old woman, breaking into a fresh torrent of tears.

Again Elizabeth checked her.

"Please don't," she said; "I think I am not well—every noise sounds so loud. Try and tell me what it all means."

"Mr. Vaughan haint told you?" Prudence fairly shrieked, regardless of the caution she had just received. "I never heerd the like—your own property too—your own dear mother's afore you—and she pulled out of her grave actilly—O Lord, O Lord!"

Elizabeth caught at the arms of her chair—everything began anew to totter and reel.

"If you don't tell me, I shall die," she whispered. "Prudence, Prudence!"

"It's sold, I tell you; and they wanted me to believe it was your work," cried Prudence. "Sold, every acre and foot—house and all—even to the graves. O that was what cut me worst! I said to Mr. Vaughan I'd lived—"

"Has Mr. Vaughan been here?" broke in Elizabeth.

"Why, he's here somewheres now, else

down to the village. Didn't you even know that?"

"Go and find him, Prudence," said Elizabeth.

A hot indignation sprang up under her pain —the outrage was so flagrant, so atrocious. She could hardly realize it yet; even now that she knew he was here, she could scarcely force herself to believe he had not only sold her old home, but allowed the graves of her parents to be desecrated. Then her indignation inspired her with a sudden resolve; she called Prudence back.

"Tell those men to stop their work," she exclaimed. "I will not have another thing touched,—not a thing."

The old woman shook her head sadly.

"'Taint no use now," she replied; "it's too late, Miss Elizabeth; the place is gone, unless —why law, you must ha' signed the deed if it's reg'larly sold."

Elizabeth remembered that two days before her husband's departure she had been ill with a torturing nervous headache—a headache caused by several hours of unremitting toil for him when already sorely fatigued. Darrell had come into the room where she lay half asleep, apologizing for disturbing her, but it

was necessary she should sign her name to two deeds; he was about to sell some wild lands he owned, and, of course, required her signature. She was too ill to ask questions or to think, and after that she forgot the matter. She recollected now how gentle he had been—bathing her forehead, holding the papers so that she could write without lifting her head! All the while he had been basely deceiving her! O it was impossible; he could not be so vile! She would doubt even the evidence of her own senses rather than credit this!

"Say nothing to the men," she said, as these thoughts whirled through her brain. "Go and find Mr. Vaughan."

She remained there for what seemed a very long time. Once Margot came and addressed some question to her, but she motioned the girl away; speech was too painful to be attempted during this suspense. Twice she rose with the idea of going herself to seek Darrell—sat down again, deterred by the recollection that their meeting ought to be without witnesses.

Mrs. Anderson came back at last; she had walked rapidly, and was in a pitiable condition between weeping and fatigue.

"He aint around, my deary dear," she said;

"he 's driv off with some o' them men; but I left word with everybody to send him on to the house as soon as he got back."

She must wait; until she had seen Vaughan she could not even command the workmen to stop: they might answer that they were obeying her husband's orders! The sound of hammers, the tread of feet, the murmur of voices, came up every now and then, and shook anew the composure she was struggling so hard to attain. She rose at length, determined to get beyond the reach of these noises, which struck like blows upon her heart.

"I will be back presently," she said to Prudence, who was not yet sufficiently restored for conversation.

"But you haint had nothing to eat," she expostulated, roused into thoughtfulness at once. "It 's all upset, but I could manage sumpthing."

"I 'm not hungry—I can't eat, thank you," Elizabeth replied. "Give Margot some luncheon if you can."

She passed down the steps, and hurried through the shrubberies which extended towards the hill. At first Prudence did not comprehend whither she was bound; but when she saw her take the path that led to the gates

dividing the grounds from the ascent, she exclaimed,—

"Good Lord! she mustn't go there! Why that would be worse'n all the rest to her!"

She dashed off in pursuit, calling on Mrs. Vaughan to stop. Elizabeth was so engrossed by the terrible thoughts which agitated her mind and the awful pain at her heart, that she did not hear. Suddenly the old woman stood still, muttering,—

"Mebby she hears and means to keep on. Wal, going won't make it really no worse, arter all. What it all means is more'n I can make out, only that husband of hern has been at some villainy, smooth as he looks. I know more about him 'n she does. La, if I 'd a chose to speak—but there, she was married to him, and what was the good?"

She walked back to the house, where she was joined by Margot. While Prudence did her best to prepare something for the Frenchwoman to eat, the pair held an animated conversation, though neither could understand a fourth part of the other's talk—a fact which seemed to render both more emphatic and voluble.

Elizabeth pushed the gates ajar, and entered the grove which extended along the side of the

hill. It was a pretty place. The afternoon sun streamed in through the branches of the maple-trees; a tiny rivulet ran singing along; the voices of the early birds sounded joyous and clear. As she mounted, glimpses of the valley below opened to her gaze with the distant mountain peaks standing up purple and soft beyond.

This wood had been a favourite haunt of her mother's; there was not a path, not a nook, but was replete to Elizabeth's mind with some association of her childhood,—that childhood which her mother's love had rendered so happy. At the top of the hill a smooth level sweep of greensward spread out, carpeted with violets and daisies, groups of stately elms and solemn pine-trees guarding the spot. In the centre, under the shade of a magnificent willow, rose the tomb in which less than a year since she had seen her father laid to rest by the side of the mother whose memory was the most sacred treasure of her heart. She reached the summit, and looked toward the grave. She had scarcely noticed Prudence's words—certainly had not taken in their import. The marble monument had disappeared; the gigantic willow lay prostrate on the ground; all about were signs of awful havoc and desolation.

Elizabeth felt her senses giving way again; she sat blindly down on a bench, and hid her face in her hands, trying to lift her mind enough out of its confusion and the physical weakness which unnerved her.

There was no possibility of further self-deception where her husband was concerned; he had sold the property—actually torn her parents' remains out of their consecrated resting-place in his greed. She could only meet him once more; could only remain long enough to hear him admit his guilt; beyond that her endurance would not go. She was too shocked for tears, too much horrified even for anger. She could only sit there and shiver, while the spring wind drifted through the branches of the fallen willow, and roused a low complaint which sounded in her ears like the moan of grieving spirits.

At length the dull echo of footsteps on the turf roused her; she looked up, and saw her husband upon the other extremity of the hill in company with two men. She rose, and, with all the force she could muster, called aloud,—

"Mr. Vaughan!"

He heard; stopped for an instant irresolute, then turned, dismissed the men, and walked toward her. She sat down again, and waited;

wrath and sorrow seemed alike to leave her heart. She felt cold and stiff as if an icy wind had blown over her. A strange longing to escape crossed her mind as he approached—a shudder disturbed her whole frame; she was like a person watching some noxious thing which she had no power to escape.

He came on, wearing his usual calm, pleasant expression; there was neither confusion nor remorse in his countenance. When quite near, he exclaimed,—

"Why Queenie, I could scarcely believe my eyes! Where on earth did you spring from so suddenly?"

He had passed by the house; Mrs. Anderson had told him of his wife's arrival, so he was prepared for the interview.

"What put it into your head to come up to-day of all others?" he continued, as he reached the bench. He held out his hand—stooped to kiss her. She shrank from his caress, and kept her arms folded across her bosom, but he was resolutely blind.

"Will you explain to me the meaning of all this—this—" She had got so far quietly, but now her voice broke. She waited in silence, never moving her eyes from his face—eyes which unconsciously to herself regarded him

with a horror and repulsion he was quick enough to perceive. Still he appeared to notice nothing uncommon in tone or manner—not a shade of surprise crossed his features.

"I am sorry you happened to come to-day," he said gently. "I meant to have had everything arranged before I told you, so that there might be nothing painful to you in the matter."

"It is true, then?" she asked slowly. Her voice sounded unnaturally composed now. "You have sold my mother's home—you have not even left my parents quiet in their graves!"

"Let me explain to you—"

"I could not believe it—I doubted the evidence of my own senses," she continued, in the same low tone, which still rang out with a strange power. "I thought I was mad—I wish I had been! I wish Heaven had been merciful enough to let me die yesterday."

"My dearest Queenie!"

She shivered anew at this utterance of the familiar pet name he had caught from her father, but neither face nor voice lost their stern rigidity. She went on unheeding,—

"At least I might have died honouring you—believing in your truth, your manhood! Darrell Vaughan, you have not only desecrated

my parents' graves, not only trampled my heart down under your iron will, but you have destroyed my faith—left me alone in the night —almost without hope in my God!"

"Don't say any more," returned he, still speaking kindly, though a frown darkened his forehead. "You will be sorry afterwards—you always are, you know, when your temper leads you to judge me hastily and say harsh things."

"I think I shall never be able to feel sorry again," she answered, and a quiver shook the sternness of her voice; "I think I shall never have the ability to feel grieved or repentant any more."

He was astonished at the horror, the unutterable despair, which had seized her. He had expected tears, anger, sorrow of a certain sort, but nothing like this. Positively he could comprehend no reason for such excessive feeling. He had meant to keep his secret as long as possible, never doubting that after the first outburst he should be able to soothe and bring her to acknowledge the reasonableness and common-sense of his procedure.

"Now Queenie, let us talk it quietly out," he said, sitting down beside her, and speaking with resolute patience.

"Did you not promise me that nothing should be done? Did you not profess as much horror as I when that infamous offer came?" she asked.

"I had not considered the case—I did not understand it fully, any more than you do now," he replied.

"Did you or did you not promise?" demanded she.

"Yes, yes; but—"

"And you broke your word."

"Elizabeth!"

"You went away on a journey; in regard to that you spoke falsely. Can you deny it?"

"I have no intention of denying anything," he answered, in the same self-restrained, compassionate way. "I did it all from affection and a wish to spare you pain."

"To spare me!" she repeated, pointing toward the open grave, while her eyes seemed to pierce his very soul with their steely light.

"I must insist now on your hearing me," he said more firmly, but still with the forbearance one would exercise toward a rebellious child that needed to be brought back to reason. "I meant to write, rejecting the proposal."

She motioned him to go on, touching the palm of her left hand with the fingers of her

right, and continuing to do it at each new statement, as if jotting them down to compare the aggregate—never once releasing him from the thraldom of her eyes.

"The president of the railway came himself to see me. Now you know, Elizabeth, that one cannot hinder a road being carried along a certain route if it is considered absolutely indispensable. There must either have been a long *détour* or this cutting. I could not help yielding."

"The *détour* would have been one half mile," she said, when he paused; "it was discussed in your presence and mine a year ago. The cost of that *détour* we could have paid if necessary."

This seemed to Darrell a proposal so insane that he involuntarily shrugged his shoulders.

"Since this must be done," he continued, "it seemed better to sell the house and land. You would no longer have cared to come here, and the company were willing to pay largely for it."

"The company of which you have become one of the chief directors," she replied. "I suppose you count on at least another fortune from your share in the factories that are to be erected over my mother's home—fresh millions

from the proceeds of the road which runs across my father's grave?"

"Of course you can't reason—no woman can," exclaimed Vaughan impatiently, yet with a certain aggrieved inflection in his voice. "I have done everything that a human creature could to soften matters—stayed up here myself, superintended everything, even to the taking down of those old painted panels—and the thanks I get are reproaches and insolent looks, as if I had been guilty of some fiendish outrage."

"O!" she cried, with a sudden bitter passion, "there are enormities even fiends would shrink from; there are acts so dastardly that only a man could perpetrate them!"

"I see you are determined to quarrel, Elizabeth; if you insist upon it, we must. I have borne your taunts patiently, but I warn you there are limits to my self-control."

"I think I was wrong to say that, though I cannot be sorry," she answered more quietly.

"That's right! Now do be a dear, reasonable girl!"

She struggled for a moment with her pride and anger, then a sudden eagerness came into her face. She stretched out her hands with a pleading gesture.

"It is not too late!" she exclaimed. "Go to these men—buy back this place—give all my fortune—it would be enough, Darrell. Darrell, I have no one but you in the world; leave me my love, my faith! Do this—O my husband—for our future peace—for our souls' safety—do it!"

"I would do anything for you, Elizabeth," he replied; "but this is impossible! I am powerless! I was forced to sell—"

She interrupted him by a groan.

"Spare me any more falsehoods; at least you can do that."

"You call tenderness and thoughtfulness falsehoods!" retorted he.

"If my prayers have no effect, if my suffering does not move you, then think how this action will appear to the world! What excuse can you offer?—how right yourself in men's esteem?—and you prize that."

"Good heavens!" cried he, "men are not babies! Why everybody thinks it so wise and sensible on our part. The clergyman here, your friend, said it was just what ought to be done. He admired your common-sense. I gave you the whole credit! I said what was the truth, that if we were both to die we could not be sure this place would be preserved—it

was not a regular burial-ground—it was much better to have the bodies removed to the new cemetery near, a very pretty place. I have purchased a lot—"

She threw up her hands again, this time with a gesture that pleaded for silence.

"I must explain," he said. "You must be brought to see the thing in its proper light. You accuse me of thinking about money, you talk so much about doing good, you are full of grand schemes, can you make no sacrifice to accomplish them? The new resources which the road and factories will afford us make such designs more practicable—"

She interrupted him again. She knew too well the hollowness of such promises. No philanthropic scheme would ever appeal to this man, except it flattered his vanity or added to his aggrandizement.

"I think we must end here," she said. "O go away; leave me my life to myself!"

He stared at her in bewilderment.

"You had better talk intelligibly," he sneered.

"I want to live alone—can you understand that? I want to escape an atmosphere of deception and treachery."

"O yes; now I understand! To gratify

your vindictive disposition you want to pose as a martyr before the world—you want to ruin my whole career! This is your idea of wifely duty that you used to talk so much about before our marriage!—this is the conduct your loudly-vaunted religion teaches you! If your church-going, your prayers, your Lenten observances, and all the rest of it, have taught you no more than this, you had better turn schismatic or heretic, and see if some sensible modern faith cannot appeal to your reason a little, since the old creeds and Apostolic benedictions have failed to touch your heart!"

"I want my life free!" she repeated. "At least leave me the ability to pray, to trust in my God. I think even that would have to go."

"Now see here," he exclaimed; "we will end the matter once for all! I have done nothing which could afford you a pretext for leaving me in the eyes of the law. According to your doctrine and your Bible, there is only one sin on my part that could liberate you; you cannot accuse me of that! I have been a faithful husband, loving and kind! I am ready to be so still; to forget your unjustifiable language. At all events, we shall not separate! If you prefer war to peace, take it."

"Anything for quiet," she moaned; "anything."

"However you may judge my conduct, you are bound to believe I meant to act for the best, since I assert it solemnly. So to leave me would be only to gratify your temper; you would ruin me socially, politically, just to do this! Think a little; could any sin be greater than that? Try to cover up your purpose under what fine names you might, the truth would remain; you would live to feel and to upbraid yourself more bitterly than you have me."

He had triumphed by making others believe that this sale of the property, this removal of the graves, was with her consent and participation. He triumphed anew by appealing to her sense of duty, her dread of doing anything wrong, her fear that her motives might be actuated by passion or evil temper. She was conquered in every way. Had she gone, that mocking appeal of his to her Bible would have brought her back. She had no right to leave him; she must stay, must endure.

She sat silent for a time. He studied her face furtively, reading her thoughts as completely as if she had put them into words. He could have smiled at the ease of his victory.

But from the first he had known he should succeed; final defeat never menaced his will!

At last she turned her eyes toward him again. The fire had died out of them; the hardness out of her face; she looked utterly helpless and crushed. It was no mere submission to his edict which broke her resolution; no hesitation in regard to expediency or the world's opinion. His words had reminded her that she had no right to shrink from the duties she had accepted, the vows she had made. Life might become henceforth a martyrdom, but she must bear it. Straightway that active, living faith which animated her soul whispered the dear words wherewith the Holy Spirit encouraged His disciple—her weakness would be made perfect in His strength! It was hard to believe; difficult in this, the most fearful trial she had known, to keep any hold of the old faith! But she clung to it, torn, broken as she was; clung to it as she might have done to an actual representation of the holy cross; and once more in the life of a human being was renewed God's precious promise that no creature shall be tempted beyond his powers of endurance, since with the temptation comes always the means of escape—faith in the Father.

"I want to go home," she said, faintly; "let me go home."

"Yes, dear, yes!" Never had his voice been sweeter, his face more kind. "You will just have time to reach the station comfortably. I would go to town with you but I want to be certain everything in the house is properly attended to. I shall be down the day after to-morrow."

At least a season to herself was granted—a space to garner up her strength in solitude; it was much in this hour of need.

She rose to go.

"Good-bye," she said.

He had conquered. He liked peace. He was still enough under the spell of her beauty to be greatly influenced thereby, and she looked very beautiful in her suffering and prostration. It would have been a new pang, an added horror, could she have understood that his strongest reason for self-restraint and gentleness rose out of the passion of his sensuous nature.

"I'll go down to the house with you," he answered; "but let us say the real good-bye here. You are a brave girl. You will try to believe I meant to act for the best? Kiss me, Elizabeth; let us be at peace."

The handsome face bent towards her; the eyes, soft with a sudden eagerness, gazed into her own. She shrank away, moaning, —"I can't, I can't! Let me go, O let me go!"

Another man, with a temper so hasty as Vaughan's, might have been roused to anger, but he only felt a kind of pleasure in her hesitation. It would be like winning a fresh heart, gaining a new experience, to woo her back to an acceptance of his caresses. But now he only said,—"Come then, let us go! We'll not talk of these things any more. We will both forgive and forget! In our whole lives, probably, no such strong cause of difference will ever arise. I meant for the best; one day you will see it too."

She did not answer.

"You are not angry still?" he asked, presently.

"No," she replied, in a tired voice; "I am not angry. Leave the matter; you said we were to leave it."

They walked on toward the house. After a few moments he spoke of the pretty landscape, the cloud effects, the prognostications of the farmers in regard to the coming season. Another man would have done this to avoid

the embarrassment of silence, after a scene like that they had gone through, or to keep his mind or hers from dwelling on it, but it was not Vaughan's reason. He noticed, and was thinking of the matters he talked about; he had conquered, and was prepared to be cheerful and at ease; curious also to see how much self-control she could exert.

Margot and Prudence were standing on the kitchen-porch when they reached the dwelling. Elizabeth spoke kindly to both women, and before going away arranged that Mrs. Anderson should still remain in her service. She was so composed, that most people would have believed her convinced of the wisdom and necessity of her husband's conduct. But Prudence was too shrewd to be deceived, though of course she held her peace then and afterwards.

To pass through the denuded dwelling again was more than Elizabeth's fortitude could support. She requested Margot to have the coachman drive round to the back entrance.

Vaughan helped her into the carriage, and took his place beside her. Prudence alone caught the one last despairing glance her mistress cast toward the hill as they drove away.

Vaughan talked pleasantly, and Elizabeth made a pretence of listening. Margot was there; no human being must obtain a glimpse of the awful gulf across whose depths she regarded her husband. The effort and the struggle had begun.

CHAPTER V.

BREAKING HER BONDS.

THE slow, dull sweep of a sluggish river, the stretch of a meagre village along its banks, here and there a factory sending up clouds of black smoke which render the narrow streets still more dingy and close. An open square in the middle, with an old grey church. From this square, a stone bridge arching the stream; beyond, a steep hill, along whose side rise sombre, frowning houses, guarded by high walls. On the summit another square, surrounded by still more stately and sombre mansions, likewise jealously guarded by lofty walls and huge oaken doors.

This square is so dull and silent, that the one in the village below seems a Carnival scene in comparison. There is a church here too, so ancient, that the columns along the front need the support of iron stays. The tower is moss-grown and covered with ivy; a clock within strikes the hours in a solemn voice, and

the bells ring out with a muffled sound, as if they had grown weak and hoarse from age. There is a fountain in the centre of the square, backed by a huge black cross, on which hangs a bronze figure of the Crucified, but the fountain does not bubble and laugh after the habit of its kind; it only rises and falls into the cracked marble basin with a dolorous murmur, so like a human complaint, that a fanciful person might almost deem it the moan of the tortured shape above. A line of solemn cypresses extends along the church, and adds to the gloom. No matter how brightly the sun shines, it is a sombre, chilly place, that makes one shiver! So horribly silent too! Occasionally a flock of pigeons darts down from the belfry and circles about, but they are not talkative pigeons,—dark of plumage too, whispering a little to one another, stepping gingerly over the broken pavement; altogether so still and shadow-like, that one imagines them the ghosts of the cloistered nuns who have died out of the grim convent at the back of the church. There are never any children playing about, to rouse pleasant echoes by their blithe young voices. One might sit there half a day without seeing a creature pass, unless when toward sunset the gates of

the great houses open, and give passage to elderly figures, who saunter about almost as noiselessly as the pigeons, or an old-fashioned carriage drawn by sedate horses rolls out of some courtyard, and passes slowly away toward the poplar-bordered road beyond the hill.

Leave the square, go along the street which leads to the poplar-bordered road with its monotonous landscape. More tall houses, more jealous walls, occasional glimpses of dull courtyards and prim gardens, through the iron gates, which are kept as carefully locked as if the place were in a state of siege. The last of these mansions, on the left hand, is the largest and gloomiest of all, with hideous turrets rising above the roofs, and knots of chimneys, so twisted and contorted they are really painful to look at. Within the great gates a dismally clean court, a garden at the right and back of the dwelling, but a garden as dreary as a churchyard, with tall yew-trees and discoloured marble vases, that remind one of funeral urns.

The house has vast corridors, suites of rooms where scarcely an article looks younger than the days of Cardinal Mazarin—rooms which might be imposing enough filled with bright furniture and gaily-dressed crowds, but which suggest no more idea of comfort or home than

the dreary old convent that turns its back virtuously on the dead square we have just left.

It is autumn now—deep in November. Just three years since Monsieur La Tour brought his young wife to this dwelling, which to him is so precious and beautiful.

Only a twelvemonth after their arrival here Madame L'Estrange died in this house, and so an additional sense of desolation and gloom darkens it to Nathalie's eyes. That was a strange death-bed. Nathalie is a creature whose emotions are usually as evanescent as they are easy to excite, but to this day she shudders when she recalls that season. The weight of a secret which Madame L'Estrange had carried about her so long—only once breaking the silence in a few vindictive whispers to Mr. Crauford the day they met in the Swiss chalet—became too oppressive when death stared her in the face. Holding fast to Nathalie with her wasted hands, transfixing her with the unnatural fire of her sunken eyes, she gasped anew the secret, and wrung from Nathalie a promise which both knew there was scarcely a probability Fate would ever put within the girl's power to fulfil.

Can Nathalie ever forget that scene? Other

memories shall come and go, the most important events of life will leave only a transitory impression on her mind, but she will never forget that hour.

She is thinking of it now, when we find her sitting out in the dreary garden, a book lying unheeded on her lap, her gaze wandering away toward the pile of gorgeous-tinted sunset clouds in the west. She never pays much attention to the beautiful in nature unless there is some one with her to point it out. She is so occupied with dreams and fancies, which always have herself for an aim and centre, that she has slight leisure for anything else, when a musing fit seizes her. She has grown a more hopeless visionary than ever. When she is not reading novels, or putting her wild fancies and borrowed theories upon paper, she is imagining some wonderful thing which is to happen—some stirring sensation, which shall shake her life out of its present monotony—make her a heroine of romance, whose fate will afford the scribblers of another generation ample material for poems and tragedies, over which future dreamers will marvel and weep.

Directly after Madame L'Estrange's death, her husband took her down to Italy. They visited all the famous cities—sailed over to

Sicily, and Nathalie wrote an account of her wanderings. Feminine authorship was a thing opposed to all Monsieur La Tour's creeds and prejudices, but he could not oppose his young wife's will. The book was published; a noted *littérateur*, who had been fascinated by Nathalie in Rome, used his best efforts to give the work a temporary success. Nathalie tasted the first draught of a most intoxicating cup and craved more.

After the return from Italy, she was forced to accept existence in the old house for a considerable season. Monsieur La Tour was seriously out of health, and the physicians insisted upon his remaining here to try the beneficial effects of his native air. But the spring before this period of which I mean to write, Nathalie did succeed in getting up to Paris, and obtained glimpses of excitement and gaiety, which rendered the thought of life in this dull place more insupportable. She had written a little romance, full of French sentiment, impossible situations, theories at once so appalling and absurd, that a reasonable person could not have told whether to be shocked or amused. But the story possessed a certain grace and ease of style, adroitly enough modelled upon that of one of the most famous

French authors of our day, and this book too had its brief triumph.

There remained one serious drawback to Nathalie's satisfaction, however—she dared not put her name to the work. She was afraid both of Monsieur La Tour's anger and the verdict of people whose countenance she desired. The book was one which, if known to be hers, would have left no society open to her outside the Bohemian literary ranks of Paris, and insane as she was to fling off her shackles and be free, she dreaded the possible results. Marital law and the authority of relatives are very powerful in France. If she went too far, she might find herself deprived of her freedom, and kept so securely confined that she would have no opportunity even to make her woes public.

So this summer she came back to the old house. What a life!—how she hates, loathes, chafes under it!—breaks often into active rebellion, and renders poor Monsieur La Tour the most miserable elderly man in all France. He loved her so fondly—he loves her still; but now he knows that she has not in her heart so much as a gleam of tolerance for him. She does not attempt to disguise the truth; she taunts him with it whenever he opposes her whims or one of her black moods seizes her.

She execrates the staid, respectable people about—grand titled people, who, having slight vestige of their ancestors' fortunes left, are doubly grand and stately to atone for the loss. There are dull dinners occasionally—evening receptions, where the women bring their embroidery into the cold, gloomy *salons*—where weak lemonade and sweetened water are drunk—where girls and youthful married ladies are expected to listen submissively to their elders—where Nathalie is regarded with a certain wonder and doubt because she has written a book, though everybody is kind to her on her husband's account, and few even among the women can resist her loveliness and her charms when she chooses now and then to rouse out of her apathy, and dazzle them by her wit and her marvellous powers as a *raconteuse*—a style of amusement irresistible to French natures.

How long shall she be able to endure it? That is the question Nathalie asks herself over and over. Vain, frivolous in many ways, Nathalie is an odd compound. She married believing that at least in flirtation she should find a constant source of amusement, and yet even when the opportunity offers it does not amuse her. In Rome she managed to make Monsieur La Tour several times uncomfortable,

but, as she told herself, *le jeu ne valait pas la chandelle.* In Paris the same effort with the same result. Into the dull old place come now and then handsome or agreeable youths to visit their relatives. Nathalie subdues these at once—horrifies the whole circle—distresses her husband; but she does not amuse herself. When the youths, obedient to the creed of Frenchmen, feel it their duty to make love to her, she is bored, and discovers that they are vapid and shallow.

What the girl wants is universal adulation: to have a world at her feet, or some such impossible nonsense. The applause bestowed upon a successful actress would be delightful, but one man's worship, a *tête-a-tête* of tender words, even if the situation be dramatic, has none of the relish she expected it to possess.

So she tells herself it is because she has really loved, and she moans and wrings her hands and makes a god of Darrell Vaughan's memory, and chooses him for the hero of her novel, and enjoys all the misery she can manage to procure.

Here she sits in the quaint garden to-night, as pretty a picture as the fancy of a poet; older, more matured than when we last saw her; not beautiful according to strict rules—

far from it, indeed—but with an inexplicable charm and witchery about her. She is just one of those exceptional natures, those impressionable beings, who seem at one hour animated by a good angel, the next possessed by a demon. Often it almost appears as if such creatures were brought into the world to work evil, while always straining after some unattainable ideal—some vast theory which shows foul and false under the glowing hues in which its devotees enfold it, with faith too, many of them, in the purity and right of its doctrines.

There she sits, perfectly unconscious that a crisis in her destiny is even now at the threshold —that the long-wished-for cause which shall nerve her into positive revolt has at last arrived.

She is roused by a hasty step on the gravel walk—by Susanne's voice close at her side. Susanne is little changed, only that she is very gorgeous in attire, and usually very grand in manner—putting on as many airs with the servants of Monsieur La Tour's household and those of the neighbourhood as if she had always been confidential maid to the Empress of Russia. A more unfortunate person for Nathalie to have about could not be found. Susanne delights in plots and intrigues; is ready to lie to any

extent; enjoys the thousand small ways in which Nathalie deceives her husband, and considers their detention in this dull place a heartless tyranny on Monsieur's part which deserves condign punishment.

"Madame, Madame!" exclaims Susanne, clattering up on her high heels, with her head-dress fluttering.

"How you startled me!" Nathalie says peevishly. "This horrid hole is so still that the least noise makes me nervous."

"*Chut!*" whispers Susanne, as warningly as if there were somebody near to listen, quite regardless of the fact that she shouted at the top of her voice as she ran up. "Come this way; something has happened."

"What a mercy!" returned Nathalie, rising slowly. "Now I am sure it is just a bit of your nonsense; tell what it is, and be done."

But Susanne will only utter hissing exclamations, and refuse to speak till she has drawn her mistress some distance from the house, behind a thicket of laurustinus. Then she begins,—

"I saw her come in; she asked for Monsieur, so I knew she meant mischief, the old cat! I just whipped into the little passage back of Monsieur's study—"

"Who came—what do you mean?" interrupts Nathalie, giving her shoulder an impatient shake. "It must be Madame de Mercœur, I suppose."

"She divines at once!" cried Susanne triumphantly. "Ah, Madame has reason to suspect her of being an enemy—the monkey-faced old wretch!"

"She has come to tell my husband about Monsieur Frédéric, I conclude," pursues Nathalie. "Well, let her; I do not care."

Madame de Mercœur is a Countess—one of the magnates of the place, as poor as Job and proud as Lucifer. She has always been kind to Nathalie, on account of a life-long friendship with Monsieur La Tour; but she has never liked her, and has been loud in her diatribes upon the folly of that worthy gentleman in his marriage. But of late she has cause to feel active animosity toward the creature. Less than a month since her youngest son, a naval officer, came home, and fell hopelessly blinded by the first of Nathalie's smiles. In the end Madame surprised the youth in the garden on his knees before the enchantress. That was bad enough; but the crowning sin proved Nathalie's conduct at the discovery. So far from showing confusion, she appeared tri-

umphant—laughed at the boy and bearded the mother. The climax had come, and Nathalie was not sorry that Madame pounced upon the scene. It had been all very well to let Monsieur Frédéric write her letters, to reply in pages of equally exaggerated trash; but to-day he had screwed his courage up to the point of revealing his passion in open language, and, as usual when an adorer reached this stage, Nathalie's interest in the sport flagged, and the youth became a bore.

Nathalie has not scrupled to repeat the whole story to Susanne, mimicking the Countess and her hopeful to the life. Indeed, she would have revealed it just as unhesitatingly to her husband, only that since the scene she has chanced to be in an amiable mood where he is concerned, and does not wish him to have the pain of giving up his old friend's society. Madame fled from the neighbourhood with her boy the day after her discovery, but Nathalie had this morning heard of her return, and is not in the least astonished at this visit.

"I am sorry now I did not tell Monsieur myself," she says; "but after all it is of no consequence; let Madame make her moan."

"Ah, but it is worse than that," cries

Susanne. "She has found out that you wrote the book—they are quarrelling."

Nathalie turns pale, but answers recklessly,—

"It had to come sooner or later! Well, there is nothing he can do; he dare not shut me up."

"Men dare do anything," answers Susanne.

"Not with a woman like me!" cried Nathalie proudly. "Let me alone, Susanne; I want to think—I must reflect."

Nathalie's reflections do not go beyond vague resolves of angry defiance, but she enjoys the excitement, alarmed as she is, and even contemplates with satisfaction the idea of martyrdom—not carried to an unpleasant extent.

Madame de Mercœur has not rested till she found some weapon wherewith to smite her insolent foe. Through a gossiping correspondent she has learned that Nathalie is the author of the much-talked-of novel—a work which the coterie of the select in Du Bourg regard with horror. Monsieur La Tour has himself publicly expressed opinions of unusual violence concerning the book, declaring it unfit for any woman to read.

Poor Monsieur! With unscrupulous ferocity Madame intrudes upon his quiet and pours out

her tale. The little idyl in which Nathalie has indulged with the susceptible Frédéric admits of no doubt. There are the letters; one of them is held before Monsieur's eyes; but when he discovers what it is he turns away. The story in regard to the authorship of the romance he refuses to credit, though in his heart he knows that it is true.

"To-night I shall have a copy of the journal which gives her name," cries Madame. "We shall see what you can say then."

"It will be no proof," replies Monsieur, but his troubled heart sinks under a fresh pang. It seems to him that he must die of shame and grief; but he bears up, asserting again that the story will be found to have no foundation. Madame de Mercœur pities and blames him all in a breath, and is so bitter against Nathalie, that at last he fires up, and more than hints, though with great courtesy, that of course Nathalie's youth, beauty, and great talents render her a mark for the envious to shoot arrows at—those unhappy ones who have lost their beauty, and possess no especial mental gifts to supply its place. This is hard on Madame, who has been a *belle* in her day. She fires up in her turn, and tells him roundly that the whole set—all this great world in little—

has decided to countenance Nathalie no longer. Her conduct has brought misery into more than one hitherto peaceful household; strange stories in regard to her birth have been for some time afloat; this history of her authorship has added the crowning sin to her wrong-doing! Nathalie is to be tabooed—made a social pariah; the magnates of Du Bourg will send her to the wall, and gather their garments closely about them as they pass, lest her touch should contaminate their purity.

Then Monsieur rises, and, pale as death, asks his visitor if she has any other communication with which to honour him. She accepts the hint, and goes out with scanty leave-taking. Though even in the height of his wrath and pain, Monsieur cannot forget his old-fashioned ceremonious politeness. His icy courtesy brings Madame a little to her senses—she is not to be outdone in that line, and their bows and obeisance are a sight to behold.

The door closes; Monsieur falls back into his *fauteuil*, and sits there, looking five years older than he did an hour ago—sits pressing his hands to his forehead, trying to collect his thoughts, to decide upon some course which shall be at once right and as merciful as he can make it towards Nathalie.

The room is filled with the grey shadows of twilight before he rouses himself from his meditation—is roused from it rather by the measures of a clear, youthful voice which float up from the garden. Nathalie is returning to the house, singing in very recklessness and defiance. Just then a servant taps at the door —enters with a parcel, and Madame de Mercœur's compliments; she sends the journal of which she was speaking to Monsieur. Madame has had the decency to seal the newspaper, that it may be safe from the prying eyes of the domestics.

"Will Monsieur have lights?" Monsieur only shakes his head; the roll which the servant has placed in his hand drops from the nerveless fingers. The man thinks Monsieur lays the package on the table; but it is not so. He has reached the door, then his master speaks for the first time.

"*Mes compliments respectueux à Madame;* if she is not occupied, I should be glad if she would come and read to me for awhile."

The servant goes out; Monsieur bows his head on his hands, and sits still. Presently there is a light step in the stone gallery—the tones of the merry song which reached him from the garden a little time before again fill

the sombre room with their melody. The wrinkled hands which support the head, grown so grey during the past year, shake nervously, but he does not stir.

Once more the door opens; Nathalie pauses on the threshold to exclaim,—

"What a dungeon of a room—like all the rooms in this old den! If I am compelled to live here much longer, I shall pitch a tent in the garden; that is bad enough, but it is a degree better than this awful barrack."

"You do not like this house?" Monsieur says, seizing upon the chance her words have made to get at once to his purpose. "You would not mind going away?"

"Mind! Why Patagonia, wherever it is, would be Paradise compared to this place." Nathalie is rather nervous—somewhat frightened; but she keeps up a show of courage—over-does it, in fact, so that it looks like bravado. "Martin said you wanted me to read to you—I must have a lamp."

"One moment, please! Come in, Nathalie." She enters, and closes the door.

"Well, then!" she says in her defiant voice.

"About going away first," he continues, looking at her with a gaze so wistful and sad that it ought to soften her heart, but she is not

in a mood to be touched. "I think it may happen," he goes on slowly, after another pause; "indeed, I can see no other course to pursue, at least for a time."

"So much the better!" she cries. "We shall go to Paris."

"No, Nathalie; to Languedoc—to my sister's."

"What!" she almost shrieks, preparing to rush into a fury without loss of time. She has subdued him before this by a display of temper; he so dreads to see her behave unworthily that he often yields a point to escape the humiliation—perhaps he will now. "To your sister's—the awfulest old dragon in all France! I'll not go—I remember my one visit there! I tell you I will not go—I'd rather stay here even than endure that purgatory."

"Unfortunately, you have rendered it impossible," he says, still speaking in the same slow, sad fashion—he is too depressed and broken for anger. "We must go away for awhile. I will even relieve you of my presence, but I must place you under proper guardianship. There is no one so fit as my sister—no one who, misjudge her as you may, will prove so kind, so lenient a friend, if you permit her."

"And now, having announced your lordly

will, perhaps you will condescend to explain what all this means," cries Nathalie. "You can neither drive nor frighten me, I warn you; I am not a woman of that sort."

"Child, child!" he says, reprovingly, yet with a quiver of pity in his voice, as if trying to soften his own judgment in regard to her by this name.

"Let us get at the bottom of the matter at once," pursues Nathalie hotly. "That old demon, Madame de Mercœur, has been with you. What falsehood did she bring this time? Brave man—gentlemanly conduct to listen to complaints of your own wife!"

She will neither coax nor plead; she will bear down upon him with the full weight of her will; he shall yield, beg for forgiveness; Madame, and all the rest of her enemies, shall see that their malice has only served to leave him a more submissive slave than ever.

He does not recriminate; one might almost think he had not heard her cruel words, only that the grey head bows lower, and the sad eyes, which watch her always, grow misty and dim. His hand stretches out, and takes up the newspaper—he breaks the seal. He has no need to search for the paragraph he wants—Madame has folded the journal so that it meets

the eye as it is opened, and she has drawn a wide line about it with very black ink into the bargain.

"Will you read this?" he says, his utterance growing still more difficult.

Nathalie takes the papers—goes closer to the window, and glances at the marked paragraph. She is so delighted with seeing her name, so charmed by the fulsome compliments paid her beauty and genius, that she absolutely forgets the danger which menaces her, and cries out ecstatically,—

"O how it praises me!—signed 'R. V.' Why that is Monsieur Valmont, the most celebrated critic in France."

"Nathalie!" The name is groaned out with such mingled pain and horror that she comes back to her senses. She remembers the exigencies of the moment—is more angry than ever at the idea of restraint or opposition just when such incense and triumph are offered her.

"So this was the old cat's errand!" she cries. "*Eh bien!*—afterwards? You have not read it; stay, you shall hear how the world estimates the woman you and your miserable idiots of neighbours deem a child—a frivolous butterfly, that needs counsel and guidance. Listen then!"

"No, no; I don't want to hear," he exclaims brokenly.

"'The much-talked-of romance, "Le premier Pas," whose audacious theories astonished limited intellects as much as its pathos and dramatic plot touched heart and imagination—'"

"Nathalie! Nathalie!"

But she reads on unheeding,—

"'This eloquent appeal against the unjust tyranny of our social laws—this bitter, ironical exposition of the iron rule of marriage—'"

"I tell you I will not listen!" he interrupts.

"Bah!" she cries, contemptuously. "Of course you cannot understand or appreciate! Skip that part then. 'This work, assigned to so many different writers, is, we are credibly informed, the production of a lady already favourably known as the author of "A Winter in Italy,"—a lady whose beauty, grace, and varied charms for a little time last spring fascinated the literary circles of Paris—'"

"Nathalie! I beg, I entreat!"

"'A certain Madame Nathalie La Tour,'" continues the young voice, shrill with triumph. "'One sees that she has written from her inmost heart. The details of an actual experience are here unfolded. She transcribes a drama which she has lived. She—'"

By a sudden movement Monsieur's trembling hands almost succeed in wresting the paper from her. She retreats, calling out—

"You shall hear; you shall! Listen to this bit. 'She has placed herself amongst the foremost disciples of the school to which so many of our great writers belong. She boldly avows her hatred of the tyranny of marriage; her belief that love is too holy and powerful to be shackled by men's petty laws—'"

She is interrupted again; it is only a groan this time. Still she reads on from another sentence that has caught her eye.

"'The incidents of the heroine's marriage, the selling of her to a rich elderly man, the defeat of her lover's efforts to save her, are all said to be actual experiences—'"

"It is not true—at least that is not true."

"It is," she cried, flinging the journal down; "it is true! There then, do your worst! I have suffered enough—been submissive too long; I will give my wrongs full voice at last."

She stops, alarmed at the possible consequences of her own recklessness, but the bowed form before her does not stir. She picks up the newspaper and hides it in her pocket; this tribute to her vanity is too precious to be rudely treated. Then she hears a rustling of

other papers. She sees that Monsieur is extending toward her a package which she recognizes at once—her letters to Monsieur Frédéric. One of them has been separated from the rest—it is open.

"I have not read these," Monsieur says; "that single page I read; it was placed in my hand before I knew what it was."

Nathalie's quick eyes fasten on it; a passage in which she bemoans the weariness of her life—the utter lack of sympathy with her husband; a rhodomontade as overstrained and untrue as possible, though she tried to believe herself in earnest as she wrote.

"Go on, go on!" she says. "What do you mean to do now?"

"Take your letters, Nathalie," he answers; and still no thrill of anger sharpens his mournful voice. "Child, child, I have tried to see what was best to do. I want to act aright. It is so hard to know! I cannot leave you to yourself—to the consequences of your mad folly."

"Are you silly enough to suppose I cared for that young idiot?" she asks. "The coward, to give up those letters! You ought to kill him! I played a little drama just to teaze his mother."

"I know—I know. Of what men call sin in a wife, I hold you innocent, Nathalie. I am not thinking of that. If I were your father I could not be more anxious to help you. I can see but one way."

"To send me to Languedoc? I'll not go."

"Here we cannot stay, Nathalie. I could not live among my old friends and see my wife avoided; the talk of every servant's tongue; the scorn of those I honour and love—"

"Your friends are idiots, *fossiles*," she breaks in. "Take me among real live men and women of our century—people who can comprehend me. Let me have my life!"

"Never! I put aside the danger you would run—the sin on my part of throwing you in the way of temptation—"

"Bah!"

"But I cannot as a Christian, as I fear to offend my God, aid you in promulgating the dreadful theories you have imbibed from bad books—theories whose evil you do not half understand."

"You forget to whom you speak!" she interrupts again. "You have the honour to be allied to a woman who has already given proofs of her talent! Do not presume to set your puny judgment, your old-time scruples

and superstitions, against the verdict of the world."

"Ah child, can you not see! You have only gained a little notoriety among a set of people glad to hail a young, respectable girl as one of themselves: this is not fame—this is not literary reputation."

"My book has been translated into Italian and English," she exclaims. "I saw only the other day that it had run through three editions in America! I have another finished—ah, what a work! It shall be published too: your tyranny cannot prevent that."

"If it inculcates similar doctrines, I must prevent it," he replies. "Write books fit for a woman to pen, for women to read, and I will not interfere."

"I defy you!" she cries.

"Then you must listen to my will and you must obey," he answers. "Nathalie, in France a wife cannot easily dispute her husband's law. Painful as it is, I must insist on obedience."

She laughs aloud as she stands before him, her eyes dilated, her face convulsed with passion.

"Let me hear your will — your regal decree!"

"If you could only trust in my tenderness—

if you could believe what my age and experience make clear to me," he pleads.

"Genius has no need of either," returns Nathalie grandly; "its intuitions are unfailing."

"You have a whole life before you," he continues. "The time must come when you will see in their full horror the ideas and theories which look so beautiful to you now—"

"Which are to become the hope of the future," she breaks in again, with a majesty that would have aroused a less interested listener. "I expect persecution—all reformers and apostles must; I do not shrink."

"The time to die will come at last," he goes on, unheeding her interruption, his voice growing lower and more tremulous. "Child, there are sins enough which affect one's own soul to repent at that hour; do not add to the weight the awful memory that by your written words you have done incalculable harm to the souls of others."

"I cannot argue with you," retorts she contemptuously. "It is useless to attempt to make you understand! Yours is a narrow, priest-ridden nature—I am a philosopher: the very word is beyond your comprehension."

Absurd as the speech is he cannot smile; he

can only grieve over her blindness and perversity, wondering by what means he may save her from herself—from the effect of evil teachings and evil books.

"Let us end the discussion here," he says wearily; "for the present, at least."

"I told you arguments were useless," she replies, almost ready to believe that she has conquered, and will be allowed to pursue her own course unmolested. But the flattering delusion is quickly dispelled, for Monsieur adds,—

"As soon as you can prepare, we will set out on our journey."

"What?" she cries.

"I told you we could not remain here—it is impossible; we must go without delay."

"To Languedoc?"

He bows his head.

Nathalie stands for an instant dumb with rage and terror, then bursts into a torrent of angry speeches which he does not notice. She sweeps out of the chamber, and leaves him alone in his grief and desolation—the terrible solitude of an old man, whose one hope of earthly happiness has been dashed into ruins.

"It has come at last," Nathalie says this night to Susanne. "At least I can depend on

you. I have already arranged a plan—he shall not wreck my life in its very opening."

"How will you manage, Madame?" asks Susanne, greatly impressed by her looks and words. "What will you do?"

"Do?" she repeats. "Go to America—he cannot touch me there: to America!"

But even as she utters the name her mother's dying words come back, and Nathalie shivers and turns pale, mad and reckless as she is.

CHAPTER VI.

LAUNCE'S PICTURES.

It often happens, especially in the history of married lives, that even when some important crisis is reached, no events of consequence follow, although at first it has seemed impossible that existence should ever settle back into the groove from which it has been so rudely shaken.

After that interview with her husband, in sight of the empty grave which his greed for wealth had violated, Elizabeth Vaughan went home. For several days she was left to herself; then Darrell returned, but was called away immediately to Washington, so that almost up to the time for their departure into the country she was granted a season of solitude.

She needed this season to reflect—to face her life with its present pain, its future dreary possibilities. The hero about whom she had

tried to cast a glow of enthusiasm so bright and warm that she could believe even her heart joined in the worship, was flung down from his pedestal for ever. One course remained, the fulfilment of her wifely duty; and to satisfy her conscience this could take no narrow scope. She must put from her mind bitterness and wrath; she must struggle against contempt and distrust. It was very hard, but she did try—faithfully, constantly.

When Darrell reached home he found her tranquil, cheerful, and no allusion was made to their last meeting.

The summer went, the autumn came, the winter, with its round of society duties, which, under other circumstances, might have possessed a certain pleasure for Elizabeth, if only she were not forced to think she was wasting the time.

Most people regarded her as a beautiful statue, with nearly as few human sympathies as her stone prototype. The few who learned to know her marvelled what struggle was going on in the pure soul; but she made no confidences.

Scenes between Vaughan and herself were rare; now and then his fiery temper broke out, but ordinarily peace reigned in the house. He

was less and less at home. Business, pleasure, led him about, and his numerous schemes occupied him greatly. He was a very successful man—honoured, courted. This period was the heyday of his triumph. Few reports to his discredit got abroad; he was still careful in his conduct. Elizabeth's empire was rapidly wearing away. There were times still when her beauty filled him with fierce passion, and he could scarcely tell whether he loved or hated her—when he would have burned her soul up under his kisses if he could.

Elizabeth Vaughan lived to endure the most horrible form of degradation which can befall a pure woman, and pure as she was, she could not shut the humiliating truth from her soul. She belonged to a man who prized her beauty because it appealed to his sensual nature—valued her mental gifts only as they could be employed in his service. A slave in an Eastern seraglio could not have been placed on a coarser level, and here this woman had to live.

Thwarted in every laudable ambition; fettered even in the expenditure of money which was her own; obliged always to preserve for the world's sake, for duty's sake, the semblance of respect, an appearance of trust in what she knew to be the hollowest sham ever hidden

under a golden exterior, lest it should be her hand that rent the veil and showed him to his fellows as he really was, thereby rendering him so utterly desperate that no chance of redemption would remain.

And she still tried to hope for this; tried to believe that he would grow out of his faults; and always just when some noble word, some worthy act, seemed to promise a fulfilment, a cruel fate would force the truth upon her, and she was doomed to see plainly the selfish motive, the studied craft hidden beneath.

Her life was not an idle one. She gave not only all the money she could for the charitable purposes which had been the dream of her girlhood, but actual superintendence, real, honest work, to atone for the limited means in her control.

The season advanced. Of course there was the usual round of balls and dinners; constant festivities at their own house or abroad. Elizabeth did her part—perfect in dress, calm and dignified in demeanour; and so the days passed.

It was toward spring once more when business brought Mr. Carstoe on from California—the first time he had visited the East in many years. Vaughan had need of his services in some company or project. He could trust

Carstoe's honesty and ability; and where the former quality at least was concerned, Vaughan's faith in most of his kind was exceedingly limited.

Carstoe was often at the house, a devout admirer of Elizabeth's; and she learned to enjoy greatly his quaint conversation, and to appreciate the stern integrity and perfect uprightness of his character. Not an extraordinary person in other respects, Carstoe impressed one as far beyond the common run of humanity as regarded these virtues. It was a keen pleasure to Elizabeth to study his nature for this reason; a comfort in the midst of the dissimulation and scheming which surrounded her, to watch this grave, plain, elderly man, so firm to his convictions, so honest to his word. Absolutely his society gave her a feeling of rest! Most things on which she had placed her faith looked so shifting and unstable that his immovable rectitude was like a prop to her tired soul.

Mr. Carstoe was the most unassuming of men —proud too in his quiet fashion, and utterly incapable of pushing or forgetting his position; but he was rather petted by both husband and wife, and their kindness and consideration came like a gleam of sunshine into the loneliness of his life.

Mr. Carstoe's respect and admiration for Vaughan were as unbounded as ever. If he could have brought himself to accuse Mrs. Vaughan's character of a fault, it would have been on account of her manner to her husband. She was unfailing in all essentials of deference and respect, but less impulsive and demonstrative than Carstoe (always a little visionary when love and marriage were concerned) could have wished. But he felt certain it was only her manner; of course she loved him, and they were a very happy couple: Carstoe would have gone to the stake in support of that belief.

Side by side on the elevation which Vaughan and his wife occupied in his esteem, Mr. Carstoe placed Launce Cromlin. Naturally he could not be long in the society of Launce's relatives without mentioning the young man's name. It was the first time Elizabeth had ever heard it spoken except joined to slighting allusions or open condemnation. Her father had told her something of Darrell's cousin. As Mr. Crauford had made a *bête noire* of Launce, he was loud in his censure: according to him, Launce was a cross between Caligula and a modern rake. When she asked Vaughan, his hesitation and hints were as expressive as her father's sweeping, though vague censures. Of the reasons

for his uncle's distrust she knew nothing, and indeed she forgot all about Launce Cromlin until Mr. Carstoe brought his name abruptly into the conversation.

"Didn't know he was in America," Vaughan said.

"He is not, but he has sent several pictures over, and they are attracting great attention," Mr. Carstoe replied. "The very best judges pronounce that he has won for himself a foremost place among our artists."

"Really I have not even heard the paintings mentioned," Darrell observed disdainfully.

"They are only recently arrived—yesterday's papers began to speak of them; but they had been exhibited in London, and they established his reputation there."

"Dear me; well, I am glad that Launce has won a little notice, however ephemeral," returned Vaughan carelessly.

Nothing is perfect—there are specks on the sun! The one blemish to Darrell's perfection in Mr. Carstoe's eyes was this underrating of his cousin. But he was too wise to make matters worse by arguments or expostulations.

"I suppose you have not seen Mr. Cromlin's pictures yet?" he said, turning to Mrs. Vaughan.

Elizabeth roused herself—she was falling

into the bad habit of growing abstracted and pre-occupied. During the last half-hour, while the two men talked, her thoughts had been travelling worlds away or brooding drearily over the life which looked so different from her girlish dreams—the life so void of fruition that it was hard to be patient—hard to remember that "they also serve who only stand and wait."

Several times while conversing, Mr. Carstoe had glanced at her in a meditative, questioning way. He had been some weeks now in the habit of seeing her daily, and of late, absurd as it seemed, he had occasionally caught himself wondering if it were possible that her happiness and content could be less complete than he had supposed them.

It was growing a very sad countenance, that beautiful face of Elizabeth's—graver than suited her youthful loveliness; acquiring too a self-restrained expression, which ordinary observers called pride and haughtiness, but it possessed a different significance to the few capable of closer, clearer judgment.

More than once Darrell had glanced towards her likewise, but with a feeling of irritation which he found it difficult to restrain. He was talking particularly well, and it irked his vanity

to perceive that he had only one listener. Had there been twenty people in the room, and a single person among them appeared indifferent to his eloquence, he would have been annoyed. But this increasing habit of absorption or reverie on Elizabeth's part irritated him hugely. It was as if her soul soared off beyond his control; and though what he called love was rapidly wearing out of his heart or fancy, he chose to dominate her still.

So now, when she started a little as Mr. Carstoe roused her suddenly by speaking her name, Darrell said with a laugh,—

"She has not heard a syllable! My wife looks a sibyl, and is as abstracted as a Sappho."

It sounded only like pleasant raillery to other ears, but the remark was meant to sting, and Elizabeth understood its full significance. The more he taxed her talents in his service, the more he sneered covertly at her powers, making it evident that he considered her devoured by vanity and self-esteem for which her mental gifts or her achievements offered no foundation.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Carstoe?" returned she interrogatively.

"I was speaking of Mr. Cromlin's pictures," Carstoe answered.

"Launce, you know—my cousin," Vaughan explained, with a polite sneer in his voice: it was always there when he spoke of his relative.

"Yes," Elizabeth said. "I have seen a few of his pictures since we came back to America; they seemed to me to show great talent."

"Now that settles the matter!" laughed Vaughan.

Mr. Carstoe laughed too, thinking the words a merry jest, under which, while pretending to speak lightly of his wife's judgment, his great love and admiration for her were plainly visible. He worshipped the beautiful woman—Mr. Carstoe knew this. Elizabeth paid no attention whatever; did not seem to hear; though she never grew hardened against such petty insults from her husband, however much she might despise them—a proof that she still had some feeling left where he was concerned.

She went on quietly speaking of the paintings to Mr. Carstoe.

"Those were youthful works," the lawyer said. "These new pictures are far beyond anything he had done before."

"You must go and see them, Queenie," added Vaughan, in his kindest voice. "Indeed, we ought to buy one or two, if there are any for sale."

"Several I know are already sold in England," Mr. Carstoe observed, "and others since the exhibition opened here."

"Then we must make haste," said Vaughan. If Launce was achieving reputation—though the bare thought made Darrell grind his teeth—it suited him to appear the munificent patron as well as friend of his cousin. "Don't forget, please, Queenie dear! I shall try and look in myself, but I am awfully busy just now."

"You wish me to select and purchase one?" she asked.

"By all means."

"There's one I fancy greatly," Mr. Carstoe said. "It is an Italian scene—a balcony and garden back, and a beautiful woman and child in the foreground."

"Italian?" repeated Vaughan. "Ah, that will be the picture to choose, Queenie—we like anything that reminds us of our magic land."

She caught the sneer again. Italian! The word carried her back to those days under the soft Tuscan sky when her dreams looked so near fulfilment—when the idol which her enthusiastic nature craved for worship seemed to have descended at her side, as unexpectedly and in a shape almost as glorious as the gods.

were believed sometimes to appear in the old days of mythological credences.

Here he sat now opposite her; handsome perhaps as ever, though the face looked worn—from toil and mental effort the world would have said; from dissipation and evil courses she knew, and could not soften the terms, try as she might.

Here he sat mocking her in his cruelty by reference to that season whose every memory he had trampled upon and sullied; captious and irritable from a sleepless night, in a mood to enjoy hurting her in all possible ways.

"Besides buying one of these," pursued Vaughan, "we'll have one painted specially for us when Launce gets back. Say your portrait, Queenie—in that old palace *salon*, with the Pisan mountains showing through the window—you in mediæval costume, and I'll be coming toward you as a Crusader just returned—some business of that sort. Nice idea, eh?"

"If you fancy it," she replied, without showing any trace of annoyance. "You must choose some other lady for the mediæval princess though—I don't mean ever to sit for my portrait again."

Just then she was called out of the room by

the arrival of visitors, and made her escape gladly.

Vaughan and his guest went back to the discussion of the business matter which had brought the latter to the house. But Darrell did not forget that it would be well to prevent any danger of rash disclosures on Mr. Carstoe's part. So before he renewed the business talk, he must needs praise his lovely wife, and at the same time mention sundry oddities in her character.

He made Mr. Carstoe understand that Launce Cromlin's name was tacitly tabooed in the house, and that from certain feminine repulsions in which Mrs. Vaughan indulged. She was a very proud woman—a very peculiar woman; and the stipulation in that will of his uncle's had been a wound to her pride.

In his wooing and success Darrell had received no assistance from the dead man's request and the letter left for Elizabeth Crauford—just the reverse, in fact; and it was only love that had enabled him to triumph over the distaste or obstinacy which the details of that codicil had roused in her mind.

"As for Launce," pursued Vaughan, "he would never have stood a chance. Mr. Crauford had a hopeless prejudice against him—would

not have allowed him in his house. He had known of the forgery affair; I tried to set it right—to show him how convinced my uncle was of his innocence: no use though."

"But surely Mrs. Vaughan would not be so—so unyielding?" Mr. Carstoe said.

"Ah, she never knew what made the trouble between Launce and my uncle. She only thought he had been wild and reckless, as he was; but of course I never told her of that—indeed, we just don't talk about him. I like Launce—I always shall; but I have no hope of ever changing her prejudices—all the Craufords are like that; otherwise my wife is perfect. I suppose there must be some flaw in everything human."

"I am sure when Mrs. Vaughan meets Cromlin she cannot help liking him," Mr. Carstoe said.

Darrell shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

"I'd like to believe it," he answered, "but I can't. At all events, it is better not to talk about him—above all of that wretched codicil; it is the one thing she cannot speak or think of with any calmness."

"Of course I never should mention it," replied Carstoe; "it would be an impertinence on my part."

"O no; we both look on you as a friend; but it would teaze and annoy her."

"And that I certainly would not do for the world," returned the lawyer, his face beaming with satisfaction to hear himself called the friend of these two objects of his highest esteem.

So then Darrell could return composedly to the business affairs.

A few days after this conversation, Elizabeth went to see the pictures—went again and again, for they delighted her. She did become the possessor of one, though it was paid for out of her own means, and she refrained from speaking of Launce to her husband; she had long since perceived that Darrell was always irritated at the mention of the man.

Mr. Carstoe found her in the gallery one morning when he had taken advantage of a few hours' idleness to have another peep at the productions of his favourite. Remembering Vaughan's caution, he was careful to keep the conversation upon the grounds it would have assumed had the artist been an unknown or indifferent person to both. So he was somewhat surprised when Elizabeth said suddenly,—

"I forget if you told me that you knew Mr. Cromlin?"

"Yes; I know him well."

"Indeed? I had an impression that he usually lived abroad. You have not been in Europe?"

"Never. I met Mr. Cromlin in California, the autumn after his uncle's death," Carstoe replied.

Everything connected with old Mr. Vaughan was interesting to Elizabeth; she wondered now that she had asked so little about him of this man, who had been his trusted friend.

"After? Then he was not with Mr. Vaughan either at the time of his death? My husband likewise arrived too late—at least his uncle never knew him: it was very sad!"

"Very sad!" echoed her companion.

"But I remember now," continued Elizabeth; "Mr. Cromlin and his uncle were not friends. It is a pity Mr. Vaughan could not have lived to see how he has grown out of his youthful errors—for he must have done this: those paintings tell not only of genius but patient study—study that has been the habit of years."

"Cromlin is one of the most industrious men I ever knew," returned Mr. Carstoe warmly. Since she chose to talk of Launce, Carstoe's fidelity to his friendship obliged him

to give the young man the full credit that was his due. "Most artists, they say, are spasmodic and irregular about work. Cromlin is as methodical and patient as if he were as dull a plodder as—as I am, say, instead of a genius."

"Did he go to California to study new scenery?" she asked.

"No; he did remain with that view, but it was not the reason which brought him there."

"What then?"

"You have forgotten, I suppose," he answered, feeling a little uncomfortable. "He hoped to find his uncle still alive; the letter Mr. Vaughan wrote begging to see him did not reach its destination for many weeks. Launce sailed for America, hurried on to California, but his uncle had long been dead and buried."

"He sent for Mr. Cromlin? Then he had ceased to be angry with him?"

Mr. Carstoe bowed. Elizabeth wished to know more of this man. His pictures inspired her with such admiration that she wanted to believe, if possible, that he had overcome those vices which, always in a vague fashion, she had heard laid to his charge.

"I do not know the cause of the difficulty

between the uncle and nephew," she said. "My father seemed to think the subject a painful one to my husband, so I have never asked. Have you any objection to telling me?"

So after all the husband and wife misunderstood each other's avoidance of Cromlin's name. It was all owing to Mr. Crauford's prejudices and errors. No task could be more grateful to the old lawyer than that of righting Cromlin in the esteem of any person who misjudged him. It was doubly a pleasure to attempt the work with this woman, whose good opinion he deemed an honour almost matchless.

It was better that she should know the whole. That very suspicion in regard to the forgery under which he had at one time lain had better be told. Darrell had kept the truth from her because he did not comprehend her feelings, but Carstoe was sure that she desired to think well of her husband's cousin. This story and the final discovery of his innocence by the uncle now dead would help more than anything to enlist her womanly sympathies in Cromlin's favour.

He told the history in his slow, clear manner, —Edgar Vaughan's grief at having believed the boy he loved capable of crime,—then Launce's arrival, his sorrow for his relative,

his delight in feeling the old man had discovered his innocence,—the impenetrable mystery which enveloped the affair,—Launce's illness,—all the details of his Californian life.

Elizabeth listened, while a strange wonder wakened in her mind.

Mr. Carstoe made too certain allusions to the codicil in Mr. Vaughan's will; they came back to her afterwards.

Now she was thinking most of another aspect of the affair. Why had Darrell never told her these things, instead of vaguely expressing opinions of his cousin which were calculated to impress any listener with a sense of the man's unworthiness?

Darrell hated Launce Cromlin; she could not help wondering why. And, too, the dead man had meant to make a new will—a more even division of his fortune. Vaughan knew this; but here she dreaded to doubt him; she would ask no questions; it might be an offer had been made to Cromlin and refused.

Still the fact remained that during all these years he had allowed her to think ill of his relative; had taken no pains to set her right—far from it indeed. Elizabeth hated injustice; this was a new shock and pain. Well as she knew Darrell, now it was misery to have this

fresh proof of his utter hollowness, the entire sham of his pretence of generosity and justice.

"I fear you are not well; you look pale," Mr. Carstoe said. "I have tired you with my long story."

"Not in the least," she replied, calling back her thoughts with an effort. "I knew very little of Mr. Cromlin; I have always misjudged him. At least I am a just woman; I am glad to change my opinion."

"Then I may tell you honestly that I am delighted this conversation has come about," Mr. Carstoe said, making a ball of his unfortunate gloves, which he rolled between his long hands, while the ugly old face lighted pleasantly. "I do so thoroughly honour your husband that I cannot bear to have any estrangement between them! I should not of course have ventured to speak unless you had brought the subject up. I—I—am sure Mr. Vaughan would like to see his cousin, to invite him to the house. Ah, I am very glad there can be no objection, that you feel differently, that—"

He had been stammering dreadfully all through the sentence; now he broke down in hopeless embarrassment, afraid that he had presumed too far in his earnestness.

Vaughan had given him to understand that he feared she, Elizabeth, would desire to keep him aloof from his cousin; this was evident; but what could it mean—what could have been the motive? O, it was useless to search for the reason; perhaps only a wish to make her appear in a harsh, unpleasant light. It seemed petty to suspect him of such intentions, but he had so often done similar things to prejudice people whom she esteemed, that she could not help supposing he had been actuated by a like feeling in this matter.

Her face changed, and her eyes grew at once stern and troubled. She was glad to leave the subject, once more assuring Mr. Carstoe that she had no dislike toward his friend such as he had imputed to her; that even her vague prejudice had vanished under this explanation.

Then she bade the old man farewell and went away, trying to put from her mind this fresh evidence of her husband's untiring efforts to present her in a wrong light to those about them.

CHAPTER VII.

A COUSINLY OFFER.

ONLY a few weeks later, Launce Cromlin returned to America. He had begun to reap the reward of his years of patient labour, though the ideal for which he toiled was so far from reached that the praise bestowed upon his work affected him little. It was pleasant, because his broad, generous nature yearned to give and receive sympathy, to be in the fullest accord with his kind. It was like scenting the fragrance of sweet flowers, this appreciation which floated his way,—nothing more. Only the second night after his arrival, some lion-loving dame, who had known him in Europe, begged his presence at one of those *réunions* in whose pleasantness she found the triumphs which gratified such necessity of success as her nature required—not a lofty form of the longing perhaps, but since she was capable of nothing beyond, one could only demand that she should do her part well, and that she did. It was late

when Launce appeared. Of course, he had first to run a gauntlet rather annoying to any man not spoiled by vanity, but he let his hostess have her way, and, fortunately, the persecution was soon ended by the arrival of forest kings of larger growth—a foreign diplomatist, a noted warrior, and the like—and Launce was left free to follow his own devices.

Presently he heard music; a violin and harp were discoursing eloquently in a *salon* beyond, and he passed on through the brilliant rooms till he reached that where the heavenly voices made a welcome silence. How many among those present kept quiet from a sense of decency, how few from a comprehension of the language uttered, Launce was not misanthropist enough to ask himself; had he been, the golden harmony appealed too subtly to his own faculties for him to have found leisure for the question.

The imprisoned souls in the instruments ceased their melodious cry, and the murmurs of the listeners rose, rather making one feel as if a crowd of gnats were buzzing their commendation of nightingales, believing, too, that the nightingales had sung for their benefit. Launce found that while listening to the music he had been watching a lady seated at some

distance; and, though he had not known it while absorbed by the duet, he perceived now that all the time he had watched because she struck his fancy as looking like the personification of the harmony which had thrilled his being.

A woman, young and beautiful—a woman whose very attire showed that artistic keeping and perfection were a necessity to her in the merest trifles. A dress of one of those marvellous new tints for which the eye is as grateful as the ear for a new strain of music. Bands of dark Roman gold, in which were set antique cameos, encircled the white neck and arms, and heightened the glory of her hair—hair that was bronze in the shadows, and took tints like those of a yellow topaz in the light.

Another moment and he was far enough down from the height whither he had followed the spirit voices to see more than the perfection of the dress—the grace of the attitude, the beauty of the face, into whose fairness the music had brought her very soul; he saw that the features were familiar. A second's perplexed wonder and he knew that he was standing in the presence of the woman whose image had for a brief season cast so lovely a light of dreams across his later youth.

At the same instant a hand touched his shoulder—a pleasant voice said in his ear,—

"Launce, old boy! How glad I am to welcome you home at last!"

As he turned and faced the speaker, Cromlin remembered still another fact in connexion with this lady—she was his cousin's wife. While Vaughan hurried on with gay, friendly greetings, a quick repulsion shook Launce—a half determination to check this affectionate enthusiasm by chilling words. Once more his gaze wandered toward Elizabeth. She was speaking now with some one, but her eyes were fixed on Darrell and himself. It seemed to Launce—it was an insane fancy, and he knew it—but it seemed to him that he saw a strange pleading in the glorious face, as if she comprehended the sudden impulse and entreated forbearance. The whole was only the whirling fancy of a second, then Launce allowed his hand to be shaken, and the salutations proper between such near relatives were given and returned.

"I only saw your arrival in this morning's paper," Vaughan continued. "I went at once to your hotel, but you were out; there I met Mrs. Sumner, and she said you were to be here to-night. How nice it is to see you back,

and what an amount of work you have been doing lately!"

Just the slightest possible inflection on the final word, as if to express the contrast such industry offered to Launce's past; but Launce was rather amused than irritated thereby.

"One does not like to prove exactly a drone in this busy old hive of a world," he answered smiling.

"No, no," returned Darrell, "I always knew you would feel that sooner or later. I had faith in you."

The words must have been audible to several persons standing near—people who were their mutual acquaintances. Launce understood perfectly the light in which Vaughan meant to make him appear, but he could afford to smile. Besides, no ill-timed evidence of annoyance under this affectionate patronage could have helped his case. Indisputable facts and the future must prove the falsity of the impression which Darrell desired to produce, and Launce had schooled himself in that most dignified of virtues—patience.

Vaughan's hand still lingered on his arm; he was led forward; they were standing before Elizabeth, and her husband said,—

"Greet your new relative, wild man, not of

the woods, but of the studio! Queenie, here is this wretched boy, Launce Cromlin, at last! Scold him well for not coming to our house when he landed."

The words were so gaily spoken, that one needed the most delicate intuitions to seize the covert insolence and condescension lurking beneath the cousinly familiarity. Both Launce and Elizabeth comprehended—it was like a jar in pleasant music—though neither face betrayed any consciousness.

Mrs. Vaughan looked at the new-comer with a gravity which the faint smile about the serious mouth sweetened, but did not brighten.

Still, Launce thought the little she said the most delightful welcome he had ever received.

It was the voice which made the spell—so unlike ordinary voices, that sound as if the world's dust had spoiled their ring. This voice of Elizabeth's seemed never to have been used to utter petty deceits or miserable trivialities. It was as different from tones familiar with such verbiage as a cathedral organ kept sacred to the expression of music's holiest utterance is different from a shrill piano in an hotel, degraded by the touch of every common passer-by.

The words were simple enough—Elizabeth was never pretentious or affected. She had even outgrown the fault almost universal among full ideal natures—that of talking over the heads of chance auditors. Best of all, she could listen! Had nine persons out of ten been capable of analyzing their impressions (that rarest gift), they would have discovered that the chief charm of her society lay in this —she could listen.

Vaughan stood by the two for a little, talking pleasantly; then he strolled away into the outer rooms. The harp and violin began another angelic dialogue. When the silvery speech ended, the newly introduced relatives — it seemed odd to both to remember that they were such—conversed for awhile longer. But other people came up presently to claim Mrs. Vaughan's attention, and Launce recollected that any further lingering in her neighbourhood would be contrary to the small laws of etiquette.

An hour after he met the husband and wife as they were leaving the drawing-rooms.

"We must ask Launce to come and see us," Vaughan said, as he caught sight of his cousin. "Nothing so absurd as coolness between relatives. Besides, I wish to show him that I

approve of the change there is in his life; it probably won't last long, but it is right to encourage him."

Elizabeth made no answer; she was not irritated on Mr. Cromlin's account — only ashamed for the man who spoke, who had forced upon her a knowledge of the hollowness of such virtuous pretence on his part. But Vaughan was thinking of his intended patronage—of getting all the glory possible for himself out of his relationship with Launce, under cover of that same condescension, and did not notice her silence.

"Let me see," he continued. "Suppose you invite him for the day after to-morrow—we have some people coming to dinner, you know."

Of course Elizabeth gave the invitation, and Launce accepted it without really thinking of what such acceptance implied. But he did think of it on his way home, and had no mind to be drawn into an apparent intimacy with his cousin, or to become his debtor even for ordinary social kindnesses.

Before he went to bed he wrote a note to Darrell, and told him, not this, but his cold regrets that circumstances (which he did not attempt to explain) compelled him to retract

his promise left that intention perfectly evident.

He sent the billet to Vaughan the next morning, and just after he had done so, Mr. Carstoe came to pay him a visit, and to reiterate his satisfaction at Launce's success, in a blundering fashion as comical as it was sincere. Then the good man rushed into praise of Vaughan, having it always in his mind that slight prejudices existed between the two cousins, and anxious to make each respect and admire the other as thoroughly as both in his convictions deserved.

Launce would not pain him by any expression of doubt in regard to Darrell's worth or good feelings toward himself, and Carstoe received his silence as a sign of assent to his own exalted opinions.

In the midst of their conversation some one knocked at the door.

"Come in," said Cromlin, supposing it to be a servant; and Vaughan entered.

"I was in too great a hurry to recollect ceremony," he said in his pleasantest voice. "Good morning, Launce. Ah, Carstoe, how do you do? I am glad to find you here."

"Good morning, good morning!" cried Mr. Carstoe, fluttering and rubbing his hands with

delight at this visit, which seemed a proof of his assertions in regard to Darrell's friendship for his cousin.

Launce spoke some pleasant words of greeting, as he might have done to any ordinary acquaintance, but Vaughan hardly waited for him to finish.

"Now, see here, Launce Cromlin," returned he, "that's all humbug, and you know it. You're not a bit glad to see me, and I don't want politeness—I want the truth! I came here on purpose to have an explanation—and I'm glad to find Carstoe—he'll do me justice, if you won't."

"Sit down, Darrell," said Launce, cordially enough, but not paying the slightest attention to his cousin's half-injured, half-affectionate outburst.

"Well," laughed Vaughan, "if I were a dignified fellow, I'd not do it—I'd not come near you; but I can't behave in that way. Now, Launce,"—his voice grew serious, even pleading,—"tell me outright, are you angry with me?"

"Not in the least," replied Launce.

"Come," said Vaughan, "that's something, for you always were a frank fellow, at least, and meant what you said."

"That applies to both—to both," murmured Mr. Carstoe, rubbing his hands harder than ever in delight at this prospect of a thorough understanding between his friends.

"Thanks, Carstoe," returned Vaughan.

"I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to interrupt you," said the agent, confused at finding he had uttered his thought aloud.

"I depend on you to help me set myself right with this wrong-headed fellow," continued Vaughan.

"Cromlin perfectly comprehended Darrell's drift, and the light in which his cousin meant to make him appear—impulsive, boyish, hot-brained, perhaps envious and jealous; but he felt no inclination to anger, rather amused, in fact, at Darrell's craft.

"Mr. Carstoe has been sounding your praises for the last half-hour," said he, smiling; "but let me tell you, once for all, Vaughan, you don't need any setting right with me."

"How he says the words!" cried Darrell petulantly. "Now don't put a fellow a thousand miles off with your stateliness! See here, Launce, I am going into the middle of matters at once. I wish that confounded will had been at the bottom of the sea—"

"There need be no question about the will," interrupted Cromlin.

"Yes, there need and there shall," returned Vaughan. "Launce, you ought to have had more than ten thousand dollars. I wouldn't have said so once, because I should have thought you would only waste it. But if my uncle could have known how you would work, how steady you would become, he 'd have left you more."

"Ah," said Launce, composedly, "so you thought me a spendthrift—dissipated. On what did you base your belief?"

"I don't think I could tell," replied Vaughan, with delightful frankness. "I had an idea you were very wild—as a young fellow; just what my uncle thought."

"I never had any reason to think my uncle believed ill of me until the time when he cast me off without explanation," Launce said, still retaining his calmness.

"And I never knew why either till just before his death," Darrell said. "I told you that in Europe. He told me only that he had been disappointed; that he had found you to be utterly worthless and vile."

"But, thank God! all that was cleared up in his mind," Mr. Carstoe broke in.

"Yes, thank God!" echoed Vaughan.

Launce did not speak.

"Fortunately," continued Vaughan, "nobody knew of that sad business except Mr. Sandford: he died just after our uncle learned the truth."

"It strikes me the truth is not known," observed Cromlin. "My uncle was satisfied, yet it was only circumstantial evidence on which he based his conviction of my innocence."

"It's enough to drive one wild!" cried Vaughan. "But it is only the mystery that is a worry now. It 's of no use to think; the matter can do you no hurt—will never be heard of; you ought to put it out of your mind, Launce."

"I think I have done so," he replied. "Pray don't fancy that I am making a melodrama of myself—weaving a plot—meaning to devote my life to finding out who was my enemy, and what induced him to work such villainy."

"No, no; I am sure not," said Vaughan. "Better to let it go! Carstoe and I worried and thought, but it was of no use. Perhaps it was not even an enemy—just some fellow who found himself in a corner, and helped himself out of a scrape by using your name."

"I don't care to talk about it," returned Launce. "It is done and gone! Time may clear the mystery—Time does odd things, you know."

"Ah!" said Darrell, but did not follow up the vague ejaculation, which might mean anything or nothing.

"Let it go," said Mr. Carstoe. "At least that cannot stand between you two."

"Nothing must stand between us," said Vaughan. "I suppose Launce thinks I did wrong in never writing to him after we met in Europe. But my uncle was so violent, so set against him—excuse me, Launce, I must say it—that he prejudiced me too. I admit that."

"It was natural," sighed Carstoe; "you know it was, Cromlin."

"Once for all, Vaughan," said Launce, "there is no need of explanations; I have no hard feelings toward you."

Vaughan rose impulsively from his chair, and put both hands on his cousin's shoulders.

"Prove it," he exclaimed, "by taking not only what the will gives you, but a proper share of the fortune my uncle left. I hinted at this in my letter to you; I was afraid of vexing you by speaking outright, but I must

now. Carstoe, tell him it would be right—tell him to put by his pride and let me have the pleasure of doing this. Ah, Launce, be a sensible old boy and do what I want."

Of course Cromlin felt terribly irritated; he was tempted to push his cousin away and answer roughly. He believed the whole a bit of hypocritical acting; but, after all, he had little beyond vague suspicions of Vaughan. The blotted lines he had found in their uncle's note-book were not a proof. Nothing could be gained by giving expression to his doubts. He felt that Darrell was not true—how far he had been guilty of actual treachery he could not fathom. It was better to be silent; he did not want his life marred by contention or hatred. His doubts did not make him angry; he tried to accuse himself of injustice in considering his cousin a hypocrite, but though unable to do this, it was contempt he felt, not indignation.

Mr. Carstoe was immensely touched by Vaughan's generosity. He knew that it would not be accepted, but it was noble and just, and Cromlin would give him due credit.

"Now speak, Launce—say you will!" added Vaughan.

Cromlin looked up in his face; he was sure

he caught a sudden gleam of anxiety in Darrell's eyes. He could have smiled to think of the confusion he should cause if he were to accept the lofty-sounding proposal.

"Don't let petty scruples stand between us," said Vaughan. "What do you care if the world does say I gave the money? Aren't we cousins—and who need know?"

It was a little argument that might appeal to Cromlin's pride in case the warmly-urged plea should have made him falter in his determination.

"We will have done with this matter too," Launce said. "This question of money must not come up between us again. I have all I want without asking yours."

Mr. Carstoe heard only the quiet resolution in the voice. Vaughan perceived the undertone of mockery, which made him doubt whether his cousin was fully impressed by his generosity.

"At least you will take the ten thousand dollars," he said.

"I shall not take a penny!" exclaimed Launce sternly. Then he caught firm hold of his waning patience, and continued,—"Now we are done with all that; let us talk of pleasanter matters."

"There is just one other thing—it is difficult to speak about," Vaughan began, with a neatly assumed hesitation.

"The codicil," said Launce. "Not difficult at all; but there is no necessity."

"After all, that was a matter Fate settled independent of everything and everybody," returned Darrell, with a triumphant laugh. Then he added more gravely, "I need hardly tell you that my wife knows nothing of that sad story—about the cheque: you understand. I fancy her father—a dreadfully prejudiced old party—gave her an idea you were a very naughty fellow; but with your new line of conduct you'll soon live down everybody's prejudices."

His new line of conduct! Whether he commended or was affectionate, Vaughan managed to be annoying. Launce only bowed and held fast to his temper. Mr. Carstoe was too busy now to notice what either said or did. He felt dreadfully guilty toward Vaughan, though he could not repent having told the wife the whole story, since it had been the means effectually of clearing Cromlin in her eyes.

"Come," said Vaughan, "I have not wasted my time, after all, this morning. That note

does not count, Launce; we shall see you at dinner to-morrow?"

There was no possibility of refusal now, unless he really meant to quarrel. Launce wished he had left the matter where it was in the beginning—at least he might have been spared Darrell's grand proposals and affectionate demonstrations. But he was not by any means done with the latter. Vaughan remained, talking of his friendship, his willingness to forget, his desire to have faith in the future, till Launce scarcely knew whether to laugh or turn him out of the room, and at last felt rather confused. He almost wondered if he were unconsciously a Prodigal, whom it was magnanimous on Darrell's part to receive with open arms and loudly-expressed forgiveness—the sort of forgiveness which holds a full recognition of the culprit's faults, and redounds abundantly to the credit of the forgiver.

Finally Vaughan got round to the subject of his cousin's pictures, and talked agreeably and well. Several portfolios of sketches lay on a table. They began turning them over, and discussing their relative merits as subjects for finished pictures.

Suddenly Launce felt the table shake under

a quick movement Vaughan made. He held a sketch in his hands and was staring intently at it. Launce glanced over his shoulders, and saw that it was a scene in water colours that he attempted in California after his illness—Milady in her cell. It was one of the most forcible of Launce's studies—the expression and life-likeness of the woman's face were wonderful.

"Not bad, is it?" said Launce.

Darrell turned toward him with a murderous scowl: his countenance livid—his eyes black with anger—yes, with an absolute dread added, Launce felt.

"Where did you get this?" he asked hoarsely.

Mr. Carstoe had been seated by the hearth examining a book of engravings. He came up now and looked at the sketch.

"Milady!" he said in a low tone. "Wonderful!"

Darrell controlled himself by a violent effort. Launce perceived it, and laid the sketch down.

"You saw the creature then?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Launce. "I had an idea—an insane one—that she might be able to throw some light on that secret."

"Ah!" returned Darrell.

"I told Mr. Cromlin she could not," observed Mr. Carstoe, too busy with the drawings to look at the cousins, who were gazing straight into each other's eyes, Launce confused and puzzled rather than suspicious. "She only treated him to a crazy scene."

"Ah!" Darrell said again. "What did you think of her, Launce?"

"She seemed to me half-mad: I could make nothing of her talk."

"Her visits to Mr. Edgar Vaughan were undoubtedly an attempt to make a way for a burglary," Mr. Carstoe said.

"No doubt of it," Darrell replied.

He began to speak of other matters, and presently took his leave, gay and sparkling to the last.

After Vaughan had gone, Mr. Carstoe fell into one of his states of embarrassment. Launce knew that he had something to reveal. It was his way in such cases to flutter and bounce, and behave generally like a fly hitting his head against a window-pane.

It was only to confess to Launce that he had told Mrs. Vaughan the story of the forged cheque—that is, as much as was known; old Mr. Vaughan's first anger and his final recognition of his nephew's innocence.

"I could see she was prejudiced," he said; "it was her father's doing. I couldn't help setting it straight. I suppose, considering the codicil and all, you know, it was a delicate subject to Vaughan—don't you see?"

"O yes, I see," returned Launce, wearily, then tried to rouse himself. "It was very good of you, Carstoe. I am much obliged all the same; I am not likely to see much of my cousin or his wife."

"But you feel that he means to be kind; that he is friendly, as I told you he was?" demanded Mr. Carstoe anxiously.

"O of course—of course. Vaughan has about the most charming manners of any man I ever met."

So Mr. Carstoe was enabled to think that the slight clouds which might have separated the two had been swept aside, and he rejoiced in the knowledge, privately designing to relate the whole interview to Mrs. Vaughan, because he considered it greatly to the credit of both cousins.

CHAPTER VIII.

READING THE LETTER.

So Launce went to the dinner and called twice at the house afterwards. He met Vaughan and his wife almost every night at the parties and receptions from which he could find no reasonable excuse for staying away, though Launce was scarcely more of a society man than artists in general.

Elizabeth's life, or rather she herself, reminded him always of a beautiful strain of music which some one insisted on playing in the wrong key, and that not from ignorance, but cruelty.

They talked a great deal together, always upon general subjects, of course; but Launce's perceptions went deeper into the reality of her existence than those of the world about. He saw beyond the veil of resolute composure which her associates called coldness and haughtiness. To him, in spite of its beauty, her face was the saddest he had ever seen. The eager longing,

the great want, the bitter disappointment, the struggle for patience—they were all visible to his sight. The subtle sympathies between their natures, which Elizabeth herself did not as yet realize or reflect upon, enabled him to look straight into her soul through the disguises which pride and wisdom alike taught her to bring to her aid.

So a fortnight went by. There came one evening a note to Launce — an invitation to another of Vaughan's dinners. It was a little thing, but somehow the thrill of pleasure with which he held the billet and gazed at the lines Elizabeth's hand had penned, roused Cromlin, for the first time, to a perception of his own state of mind.

He did not go out that night, though he was due at a house where he would have met Elizabeth. He stayed resolutely at home, because he was forced now to recognize the reason of the new delight he had of late found in such scenes. The result of his meditations was a resolve to cut short his stay in town—to depart at once.

Elizabeth's face haunted him, the memory of the old dream had returned, and its golden light rendered her still more beautiful to his sight. So Launce knew that the prudent and

only right course would be to go away; and he was not a man to hesitate for an instant after he perceived the truth.

At present he could conscientiously assert that it was the recollection of his bewildering vision which caused his unrest, but if he lingered he might later be obliged to admit a more humiliating truth, and feel too that the fresh trouble had been brought about by his weakness in having remained in spite of his own convictions that he ought to go.

The time would come—must come—when he could meet this woman and recollect only that she was his cousin's wife, in no way connecting her with the rudely dispelled dream which during a few months had lifted his life into fairy-land—a dream which, perhaps, must always haunt him with a vague feeling of disappointment, as though he had lost some precious treasure, without which existence would lack a certain fullness and perfection.

But now he must go—go without delay.

He called the next morning at Vaughan's house to make his farewells. A resolution once formed, he did not dally: he was going away on the same evening. He tried first to write a note; a good many notes were attempted, in fact, but none suited him: either they sounded

stiff or contained polite falsehoods; and he so wanted to see her once more—just once! He was prepared to be inexorable with his weakness, but it was scarcely in human nature to have resisted the pleasure of that last visit. Darrell had gone out, but the servant thought Mrs. Vaughan was at home. While Launce waited in a reception-room, the notes of a piano rang softly down from the apartment overhead, marvellously sweet, as the voice of that much-abused instrument really is when some rare player succeeds in rousing the soul hidden under the cold white keys. The music ceased. Presently the man came back: Mrs. Vaughan would receive the visitor. When Launce entered the chamber—half library, half morning-room—where Elizabeth read and worked, she was standing near the piano. He could have sworn, when the tones struck his ear, that her hand wakened them. She moved forward to receive him with a light in her eyes which he comprehended had no connexion whatever with his arrival. The interrupted melody was still whispering to her.

"Unless you will be good enough to go on," he said, after the first salutations, "I shall wish I had stayed downstairs; I could hear you there."

"I had found a book of masses and fugues that I picked up in Germany," she answered. "I will play you something else if you like. I keep these for my own private delectation, because I can seldom persuade anybody to be fond of them."

"I know the collection," he said, turning over the pages. "It is a rare old book; how fortunate you are to possess it."

So she played and he listened; then they wandered into talk suggested by the music. The picture of Launce which Elizabeth had purchased hung near the pianoforte. It gave him a keen feeling of pleasure to see that something of his had found a place in her favourite retreat; but when she spoke of the painting he did not attempt any small compliment to that effect, such as one would have paid an ordinary woman.

He knew intuitively that the room was a haunt she loved, and its arrangement her own design. The walls were hung with grey of a somewhat severe tint, which suited Launce's artistic eyes, because it brought out the pictures so admirably. Of these there were not many, but every painting was a gem, a couple of veritable Titians among them, and a copy of a Raphael by Giulio Romano,

preserving the spirit of the master as only he could do. The purchase of these three works had been Elizabeth's sole girlish extravagance. A gallery in Venice was being denuded of its treasures during one of her visits there, and she had not been able to resist these, though the cabinet Madonna alone was almost priceless, for many art-judges declared it an original Raphael, and had fought numerous battles in regard to the matter.

But in spite of the grey hangings, and the size and lightness of the apartment, it looked neither sombre nor cold. The carpet was like a bed of leaves that the frosts have turned to a golden brown; rays of vivid colour were scattered here and there; on the walls, against shields of bright-tinted velvet, were placed rare *cinque-cento* plates and Etruscan cups. There was antique carved furniture, which had been brought from some ancient palace across seas, covered with pale silk that had flowers and quaint devices woven over it in blue and silver. Rare vases stood upon the tables; a glorious marble nymph lived in a recess at one end of the chamber; stands of odorous blossoms brightened every corner: the whole place looked not only luxurious and picturesque, but home-like and womanly.

A room that was a poem, Launce thought; as plain to read as any written expression of its owner's pure tastes and lovely fancies could have been. And the woman herself, sitting there in the midst, with her pearl-coloured robe falling about her in statuesque folds, filmy lace and ribbons of bright colour lighting it up,—every attitude she assumed as graceful as a picture,—the sad, proud face glorified by the lambent eyes and the dark splendour of her hair—hair such as the old masters delighted to paint, which altered in its hues with every movement of her head, just as her eyes changed colour with each passing emotion.

Those eyes; he could not tell if they were brown or blue! Black he would have said when the long lashes partially veiled them for an instant—then positively golden in their radiance as they shone out full again, luminous with some sudden thought. He did not know that few people ever saw her look as she did while their pleasant conversation took its course. It was so seldom now-a-days that she met any one who cared for the subjects upon which she liked to talk; so seldom she could sufficiently forget the disappointment and emptiness of her life to grow visionary and enthusiastic, as had been so easy in the old time; but Launce's

earnestness and enthusiasm affected her unconsciously.

From music and Launce's 'St. Agnes's Eve' to reminiscences of foreign lands, to the books which treat of art and kindred subjects, and Cromlin ventured to fall foul of sundry great critics, whose dogmatic assertions most people consider themselves bound to accept for gospel.

"You are very bold," Elizabeth said with a smile. "It quite takes my breath away, though several times, in Paris and London, I have met those men, and felt a rebellious desire to contradict the magnificent theories they poured out with a sort of pitying condescension for the weak intellects of their listeners."

"It seems to me absurd," Launce said, after they had pursued the topic a little further, "to talk about gradations in art—I mean for one set of art servitors to rank itself above another; for instance, that the historical painter should put himself on a grade above the delineator of landscapes, or the sculptor above them both."

"Now I think, I do not catch your meaning," Elizabeth answered. "What is your creed?"

"I should style Art a grand soul calling to men out of the infinite; all forms of art, as we

term them, only the voices of that soul wherewith she strives to lift men toward the light—up to the beautiful and true."

"Yes, I understand," Elizabeth said. "Music, sculpture, painting, poetry—Art's voices calling to men."

"In certain ways all blend. We say of a statue, it is a poem; of a poem, it is a picture; of a picture, it is a dramatic scene; of a great actor's effort, that it is the picture and poem put into action."

"Yet the latter critics rank the lowest, because it is so ephemeral in its influence."

"They might as well say a flood of sunshine is lost, or that the world has forgotten Apelles, because the actual works themselves have perished."

"And you admit of no independent forms of art?"

"The thing seems to me an impossibility. Art must remain one and indivisible. The expressions or voices of the great soul unite in harmony—no voice perfect in itself—needing the whole to make the diapason complete. Leave out a single tone—music, poetry, acting, what you will—it is like an organ with one key silenced."

"Yet some particular form—expression, if

you please—appeals much more strongly to each man's mind than the others, as a rule."

"Naturally enough! No human being can take in the glorious whole in its completeness; that would be to comprehend the spirit which controls the voices; it would be comprehending Infinity."

"And so many mistake the voices altogether!"

"Of course. There are numberless false voices shrieking through the world. Men rush after and believe in them, as men believe in false Christs, too deaf and blind to distinguish between the false and true. There are so many pretenders—in literature, sculpture—men who think of money only, or who arrogate strength to themselves, forgetful that they are but the mediums through which Art makes herself audible."

"I think the promulgation of your theory might bring about a little desirable humility among the servants of the great God," Elizabeth said.

Launce laughed.

"I just remember," replied he, "that I have been talking as dogmatically as the critics I presumed to assail."

"There is a great difference between asser-

tion and the expression of earnest conviction," returned Elizabeth.

"At least it is very civil of you to offer me that loophole of escape," Launce said, laughing still.

Presently a clock in the adjoining room warned Launce that he was making a visit of unconscionable length, for he remembered already to have heard it strike the hour—a few minutes before, it seemed to him, time being so entirely a relative term.

"We shall have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow night?" Elizabeth said, as he began to express his contrition for the long stay.

Her words brought back the reason for his call.

"I had forgotten that I came to bid you good-bye," he answered, and the words sounded very sad in his own ears. "I leave town this evening. I must beg you to accept my excuses, and make my farewell to Vaughan."

"You do not return this spring?"

"No; certainly not this spring."

"I am sorry," replied Elizabeth frankly.

Launce only bowed. His lost dream-world looked perilously fair, the reality cold and grey. He seemed to catch a glimpse of the two, both visible, though separated by more

than the breadth of a universe, and this woman standing between, in her glorious loveliness.

Then he recollected that just at present his business was to speak certain fitting words, and take his departure. It was like going away from the last gleam of radiance wherewith that dream-realm had flooded his soul.

So there came a brief silence. Elizabeth remembered once, in an out-of-the-way part of Spain, entering a beautiful garden, and spending the whole morning there, while she awaited the conveyance which was to carry them forward on their journey—a spot she was not likely ever to visit again. Perhaps for that very reason the lovely haunt had always kept a prominent place in her recollection.

Whenever she thought of it she could fairly hear the murmur of the fountain as it plashed into its marble basin, the cooing of the doves as they fluttered about in the humming of the bees among the orange-flowers, the patches of shadow under a group of cypress trees—could catch the glory of the distant Sierra, and the marvellous white clouds that drifted across the opal sky.

She thought of the spot now, and mentally compared this hour spent with Cromlin to that day. She was not absolutely regretting the

fact that they were not likely to meet soon again or often, yet for this reason the morning was a thing to treasure as she did the memory of the Spanish garden amid whose beauty she should never wander any more. Then both became suddenly aware of the silence, and began speaking of ordinary things. As Launce took his hat from the table, some careless movement scattered a pile of photographs which Elizabeth had put there to arrange in an album.

Launce picked up the pictures with a laughing remark upon his own awkwardness; then he perceived a portrait of his uncle among them.

"Is it like?" Elizabeth asked, bending her head to see which had attracted his attention, as she noticed his face grow suddenly grave.

"It was taken not long before his death; Mr. Carstoe showed me one," Launce said. "I had not seen my uncle for five years. He must have changed a great deal. The face had aged, and it used not to look so careworn—so hopeless and despondent."

He sighed, remembering how great a share the black clouds which had risen between him and his relative had in causing this alteration. Elizabeth comprehended what was in his mind, and said gently,—

"But he knew at the last,—he had this great happiness. You must always remember that."

"Yes," he replied.

But he was thinking of the sympathy there was between him and this woman. Few and brief as their meetings had been, it was already a marked and pleasant thing, this ability that each possessed to divine the feelings and fancies of the other. Then he remembered that he had no right to dwell upon this thought. It must be put away along with all the host of bright chances which his last dream had held—the treasures never touched, the happiness never to be grasped, the whole round of golden possibilities that lay buried in the irrevocable past, with those saddest of human words engraved upon their tomb, "It might have been!"

"Everything connected with his memory is very dear to me," Elizabeth continued softly. "I like to talk with Mr. Carstoe about him, to make myself feel that I really knew him."

"You would have loved him dearly, I am certain," Launce replied.

"I have a letter that he wrote me," pursued Elizabeth. "I suppose you did not know that. Such a beautiful letter! I could not speak of it to any other friend, because it holds a secret which was his; but I should like you to see it."

Again Launce only bowed his head. He was too much surprised—more than that—too much annoyed to answer. That she could speak to him of the strange arrangement the dead man had devised whereby his two nephews were to have equal opportunities of winning her regard —to him, the loser—showed a lack of tact and delicacy of which an ordinary woman might have been guilty from frivolity, vanity, or coquetry; but coming from her, the speech gave him a positive shock.

Elizabeth had opened her writing-desk and taken out the letter.

"I always keep it here," she said, "it is so loving and sweet. It seems to bring me so near him."

Still Launce did not speak. She looked up. He had grown pale; his mouth was set hard and stern under his drooping moustache. There was not only grief but an expression of disappointment, of absolute reproof, in his eyes, which startled her.

"I beg your pardon," she said; "I am afraid I have pained you! I thought you might like to see the last letter he ever wrote. It was thoughtless of me to forget that just for this reason it would be—"

She hesitated, and Launce said coldly,—

"Not for that reason."

The colour rose in her cheeks; she was hurt rather than angry. Darrell or Mr. Carstoe had told him of the romance of Mr. Vaughan's life which this letter revealed, and he thought it indelicate for her to speak of the matter. Such judgment—above all, the betrayal of it—was not only unjust, it was an impertinence. She felt a sudden pang of disappointment in her turn—the man's nature was not what she had supposed.

"I see you think I have done wrong," she said, and her voice sounded at once tremulous and proud. "We do not think alike! To me the little romance is very beautiful and sacred. I did not even suppose you knew—my husband or Mr. Carstoe has told you—"

She stopped again. She was terribly annoyed; almost angry enough now to have left him, had he not been a visitor in her own house.

"I believe we misunderstand each other, Mrs. Vaughan," Launce said, colouring too.

"Yes—we do—since you can find any impropriety in my speaking of the cause which makes your uncle's memory so dear to me," she answered. "Under other circumstances he would have been simply my husband's rela-

tive — a man entirely unknown to me. But the fact that he loved my mother makes me feel—"

"I did not know," he interrupted quickly. "You are misjudging me, Mrs. Vaughan, indeed you are."

"Excuse me!" she exclaimed impulsively. "I told you I had a hasty temper—I have been positively rude."

"No, no!" he said.

In truth he did not know what to say; he was utterly bewildered. One thing was certain: she had been thoughtless—she had not shown indelicacy or a want of tact. She was thinking only of the romance which connected her dead mother and his uncle in her mind—so full of it that she did not remember the terms of the codicil or the share given to him (Launce) therein.

"Yes, I was rude," she continued, with the rare smile that made her face almost childlike in its sweetness. "I forgot that you do not know me well — that your uncle's loss is always a grief and pain to you—that to hear an almost entire stranger laying a claim to his affection would naturally give you a sort of odd, jealous feeling."

"But indeed it is all a mistake," he said

earnestly. "I know nothing about the romance —tell me, please."

"You shall read the letter if you like," Elizabeth replied. She glanced down the pages as she spoke. A new pain, in which her companion had no share, struck her heart. She was wondering if the dead man could know how yielding to his plan had utterly wrecked her happiness—if he could see the weariness, the disappointment of her life. How could he be at rest up in the heavenly light knowing? Yet if those gone forward into the eternal sunshine do not perceive what befalls their loved ones on earth, how can they be near, as we believe they are?

Then the trouble died; Faith brought an answer. They might see; they might sympathize, and yet be at peace; for they behold what we are ignorant of—God's plan! They understand how our present tribulation is for the soul's development, and worketh out an eternal weight of glory.

The light came back to her eyes—a look of inexpressible patience and trust fairly transfigured her mournful loveliness.

Of what was she thinking—where had her soul gone? Launce gazed and wondered, but he could not ask.

How petty and miserable it had been in him for one instant to hold her capable of an unworthy thought or act. He had no part in her past; she had never seen him before her marriage. It was natural she should forget that the codicil (whose terms were detailed, of course, in the letter) could ever in any way have affected him. To attempt explanation was an impossibility; no conversation upon that subject could ever take place between them: she was Darrell's wife—Darrell's wife!

His head whirled; the hand he was extending for the letter trembled so that he let it drop upon the table. Elizabeth, still full of her fancy, did not observe him. He wanted to break the silence—to talk—to get away from the wild thoughts that stung. He meant to ask for the letter; in his pain and bewilderment he asked instead,—

"May I see the codicil?"

As soon as the word was uttered he realized what he had said, but she betrayed no confusion. She only looked surprised as she answered,—

"I never saw the codicil; the will, you know, was drawn up in California."

"I think my head is quite astray this morning," returned he, trying to smile.

Then he became so utterly confused that he

added,—"I meant the letter. You must wonder whether I am more boor or idiot to have mentioned the other."

She was still more surprised at what she took for embarrassment, and said laughingly,—

"Oh, I am not an engaged young lady to be nervous about the matter."

But it was difficult to speak lightly of that request of the dead man which had brought her such misery. Had she been a happy wife the romance might have formed a pleasant enough story to discuss with her intimates—but now! Before the speech fairly ended, Launce saw her brows contract—her face suddenly lose its colour. All he could think was that she, for the first time, remembered the dead man had meant him also to be considered in that bequest.

"I had forgotten—"

Then she stopped short after this beginning. She had intended to say she had forgotten to add that the letter gave no mention of the codicil. Of course Launce interpreted the unfinished sentence to mean that she had forgotten he had any part therein.

She did not end the phrase. She wished to leave the subject, for fear it might call forth some complimentary words—some expression

of pleasure that his uncle's wishes had been realized. She did not want to hear such speeches and be obliged to utter falsehoods in answer — say things which would imply content and happiness. Her heart was too sore for such deceit: so she paused.

But it was unfortunate that she stopped, because Launce felt bound to answer what to him her words implied. His confusion was gone—he felt cold and tired—but he was calm enough.

"Under other circumstances it would have been a matter I could not mention," he said. "I never thought—nor did you, I know—to speak of it—but—"

She did not really hear his words—only fancied that after all he was going to utter the compliments—the congratulations; and she said hastily,—

"No, no!" Then got her senses back enough to remember that a refusal would be a sort of tacit confession that her marriage had proved a mistake and disappointment. "I shall let you read the letter now."

He took it from her hand and read the pages, while Elizabeth sat thinking of all which lay between her and those bright Italian days when she had first perused those lines.

"I loved your mother," Edgar Vaughan wrote. "Your father won the prize I coveted. As I look back over my long, dull life, I find always that love and disappointment standing out the most important events in my whole past. It has been my dream that your mother's child might become connected with me by ties which should bring you close to my side. If life is spared I shall tell you these things with my own lips. If my pilgrimage is near its end, I desire that at least you should read this confession of my hopes and wishes. I am ill and suffering now—perhaps even this letter will not sound clear and coherent. Two weeks ago a great joy came to me—only yesterday a new blow struck my heart. I am too old and broken to bear either happiness or pain.

"In the trouble and confusion of my thoughts it is a rest to pen this letter. I write with your mother's picture lying beside me—with those beautiful eyes smiling at me like a promise of peace that awaits beyond this weary world. They tell me you resemble her. I know much of you, my child, though you may scarcely have heard my name.

"This is what the foolish old man has dreamed, dear Elizabeth. I hope to see you my nephew's wife—I hope when spring comes

to be able to seek you with him. But if that last great pleasure is denied me, one day he will give this letter to you himself, after he has told you his own story. For he will love you. That certainly is as strong in my mind as if a voice from heaven had whispered it. Your mother, when she comes to me in my dreams, has never failed to utter that promise. How good and noble he is you will perceive for yourself. The tale of his youthful struggles —his patience—his fortitude—you will learn from him.

"It is a conviction in my mind that he will win your affection. I try to believe that I shall live to see you happy together; but if that may not be, I want this brief record to prove how dear you are to me—what the tie is that knits my soul to yours. Perhaps I shall never tell even him the secret of my past, but when I am gone, and this letter is in your hands, you will tell him, and you will both remember that I see and enjoy your happiness."

While Launce read, Elizabeth sat occupied with bitter reflections. His blundering mention of the codicil had roused a score of painful memories. Of course when Darrell and Mr. Crauford spoke of it to her, they explained its conditions as referring only to Darrell himself.

Elizabeth had expressed a wish that after their marriage the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars might be wholly devoted to charitable purposes. Vaughan had promised this—had arranged with her the precise uses for which the money should be employed. When they returned to America, and she found that he did not resume the subject, she spoke of it. At first he put her off—the property was somewhat encumbered; after awhile that portion should be used as she desired. But when he began to throw aside his disguises, he openly laughed at her folly in expecting him to carry out a pledge which he called the romantic nonsense of a thoughtless moment.

Launce read the letter to the end, growing colder and colder—with anger now—a stern, hard indignation against Darrell Vaughan.

His suspicions, that even in this matter Darrell had behaved treacherously, became a certainty now. The entry he had found in his uncle's old note-book took a fresh significance. That entry had been penned on the very day of his paralytic seizure—the letter to Elizabeth bore the same date. He spoke of a great happiness which had come to him two weeks previous—that was the news of Launce's innocence. Only the day before that writing,

he had received a new blow—the entry in the journal proved that the pain was in no way connected with Cromlin.

A sudden light struck Launce's mind. The nephew Mr. Vaughan had spoken of in that letter was Cromlin himself! In the will which had never been discovered—the will which Mr. Carstoe believed had not, after all, been made—Mr. Vaughan proposed no division of his fortune between his nephews. Mr. Carstoe thought such had been his intention—Launce knew that it was not so. Something had decided him to leave Launce sole heir: it was of Launce he wrote to Elizabeth.

Cromlin knew this as well as if the dead man's ghost had come back and uttered the fact. How had Darrell managed—how deep was his guilt? Useless to question; in this world there would never be an answer.

Launce cared nothing for the fortune—Darrell should have been welcome to it. But this woman—this glorious, peerless woman, this reality of his dream—swept out of reach of his life by Darrell's falsehood, Darrell's skilfully-woven web of deceit and sin!

Launce could have cried the whole truth in her ears as she sat there before him in her pale, sorrowful beauty. The devils that tempt us

all at times fought fiercely in his soul, bidding him do this. He recognized Elizabeth's unhappiness—he knew, without a word of explanation, just what her life was. She had been hurried into this marriage by her father's illness; by her tender feeling towards the dead lover of her mother in that mother's girlhood; deceived by Darrell's specious eloquence, his charming manners, his noble promises; and she had lived to know him as he was, as Launce knew him—vile, base, degraded.

Yes; to tell her the whole truth, that was his impulse. He shut his soul against the insidious whispers—he held fast to his reason, and conquered. He believed in honour—he believed in God. He could neither insult this woman by the revelation of his love, which any explanation of the truth must be, nor could he even ask her to sully her soul by pity for his pain—his terrible loss.

He must get away; he could not trust himself longer in her presence. He must not see her again until time had given him strength to support the burden which this day's knowledge rendered so much more difficult to bear.

He rose—he felt that he almost staggered—he knew there was a terrible revealing in his face.

"I shall say good-bye now," he said.

Elizabeth held out her hand; he hesitated—he dared not touch it. His hesitation made her look up: she saw his face, pale, shaken with trouble and anguish.

She could not understand, but she could not question him. Something—that letter—memories of his uncle—what, she knew not, had shaken him to the very soul. His gaze was on her, mournful, despairing—as she had seen in the dismal vigils grown familiar, her lost hopes stare at her with their dying eyes.

She longed to speak some words of comfort, but in her uncertainty as to what had caused his pain, she feared hurting him still more.

"Good-bye," she echoed softly.

He touched her hand with his cold fingers, and went quickly out of the room.

CHAPTER IX.

BACK TO THE CODICIL.

ELIZABETH sat there a full hour after Cromlin left her; then Mr. Carstoe was shown into the room.

He had taken advantage of a leisure morning to go searching among all the hot-houses for a Californian plant of which he had spoken to Mrs. Vaughan, and had at last found it hidden in the depths of a botanical garden among the fastnesses of Brooklyn, and brought it away in triumph.

He was amply rewarded for his trouble by Elizabeth's thanks and admiration of the glossy-leaved thing, but his mind was a good deal distracted by a chance meeting with Launce, who had been on the way to visit him, and say farewell.

"Mr. Cromlin is going out of town," he said dolefully.

"Yes," Elizabeth replied; "he was here to bid us good-bye. His departure is sudden, I think."

"Very," said Carstoe. "He is going to visit some friends in St. Louis, and means to wander on into the far West for the summer. If I go back to California in the autumn, I shall not see him again."

"He is a great favourite of yours."

"Yes; I rank him and your husband side by side. I feel honoured by their goodness in liking me," he said, in his stiff, jerky way. "And you like him now, Mrs. Vaughan; I did not overrate his pleasant ways?"

"I like him very much," Elizabeth answered.

Mr. Carstoe rubbed his gloves into a ball at once—a sure sign of satisfaction with him. Indeed, he felt his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, and only just saved himself from clucking with delight, like a hen or an indecorous schoolboy, growing quite red with dismay at the idea of having gone so near such an atrocity in Mrs. Vaughan's presence.

"It has been so pleasant to see him here at the house on friendly terms," the lawyer continued. "I'm sorry he is going. It must have been a sudden idea. He said nothing about it when I saw him yesterday, and I thought he looked pale and worried."

It had not been her fancy then, and the

change had come upon him during their conversation. She feared that she had distressed him by the sight of his uncle's letter.

"I have had no opportunity to tell you something which happened a few days ago," continued Carstoe presently. "I knew your husband would not, because it was so much to his own credit—indeed, they both behaved admirably, as one might be sure they would in any matter."

"Mr. Vaughan has told me nothing," Elizabeth said.

"He went to Cromlin, and offered to share their uncle's fortune—was earnest and splendid about it—wasn't it fine?" cried Carstoe enthusiastically.

"And Mr. Cromlin?"

"O, he would take nothing; but he admired his cousin's behaviour, and appreciated it. They will be fast friends always now, those two," Mr. Carstoe said. "So many men would have behaved differently. But Cromlin is so frank, so large-minded. The two cousins are a great deal alike, in fact," he added, with a delightful faith in his own powers of comparison and ability to read character.

"I believe the will left Mr. Cromlin ten thousand dollars," Elizabeth observed, speak-

ing more to keep the old man from fearing that she lacked interest in the topic than for any other reason.

"O, yes; he'll not take even that though; but I did not mean about the money. In the other matter plenty of men would harbour resentment, or try to feel themselves ill used."

"What other matter?"

In his earnestness Mr. Carstoe had touched on a point which he felt himself unjustifiable in alluding to. He grew confused again, and coloured till his bald head shone.

"I beg your pardon—I do beg your pardon for mentioning it; and Mr. Vaughan had cautioned me—he said the codicil was—did—had always—"

Here he broke down completely, and sat such a picture of embarrassment, done too in as violent a purple as ever the most insane pre-Raphaelite employed, that Elizabeth would have pitied his trouble had she not been too much startled by his words to notice it.

The codicil again! The recollection of his allusion in the picture-gallery—disregarded at the time—flashed upon her; Cromlin's agitation—annoyance even—of the morning, came back too. The codicil! How far was she in the dark? What possible part or interest

could Launce Cromlin have had therein? Something there was which she did not in the least understand. Mr. Carstoe had said that in Cromlin's position many men would have harboured resentment against her husband.

Dared she question further? If the answer were to bring some new proof of Vaughan's duplicity,—though she could not imagine how this would be possible,—she should feel guilty at having done anything to render the fact patent to her mind.

Her face changed so painfully, that Mr. Carstoe was almost out of his senses from a fear that he had hurt or annoyed her.

"I wish I 'd been born dumb!" he exclaimed penitently. "Mr. Vaughan would never forgive me—quite right too after his caution! He told me the subject was unpleasant to you, and here I go blundering at it full tilt, like a bull at a red cloth!"

"I am not annoyed," Elizabeth replied. "I cannot explain; but indeed, Mr. Carstoe, I am not vexed with you."

There was a secret—a secret which Vaughan had cautioned this man to keep from her. She did not wish to hear another word; it could serve no good purpose.

"You would be vexed if you were not an

angel!" cried poor Carstoe, and then shuddered with horror at his own boldness, becoming so utterly bewildered, that he stumbled on from bad to worse. "I only wanted to show you how just and honourable Cromlin is. Many men would have hated Vaughan—thought he took an unjust advantage—tried to think so, at least—for of course there would have been no ground to think—"

Another break down. Elizabeth was only wondering how she could avoid further revelations without strengthening his dread of having offended her. But to Mr. Carstoe her silence was the surest confirmation of his fears, and he stammered,—

"Now just when you had learned to like Launce (of course I 've no business to call him so), I go bringing these stupid things up! Such a noble fellow! Why, when the news of the marriage came, he had only the kindest wishes for you both. Of course, he would have gone to Europe long before that, if his illness had not prevented. He never told me so, but I gathered it from what he let fall."

Then he stopped again, and panted and puffed, and Elizabeth's eyes, fastened upon him full of trouble, only dazed him entirely,

and on he dashed, perfectly incapable of checking his own speech.

"There seemed a fate in it, did there not? As if no wish of his uncle's in regard to him were to be carried out. The new will not drawn up—then Vaughan won the prize for which the codicil meant both nephews to have a chance; but of course Launce could have none, since Vaughan was lucky enough to gain your regard."

He could only choke and gasp now—he was past further words. In his whole life Mr. Carstoe had never spoken so fast or blundered so horribly.

Elizabeth's limbs trembled under her; a tumultuous throbbing at her heart sent a dizzying pain to her head. She had seized the full import of Mr. Carstoe's broken words.

Even when he wooed her for his wife, Darrell Vaughan had acted a false, treacherous part. The codicil had been entirely misrepresented to her. Scores of incomprehensible remarks of her father's came back; she understood them now: they confirmed her dread. Then she felt shocked at her own suspicions. She told herself that she had harboured doubts against her husband until her judgment was positively perverted. She condemned too

harshly; she was too ready to think evil of him. She must hear more; a clear explanation might show her that she was at least unjust in the present instance. Whatever had been done it could not be so vile and treacherous as the idea upon which she had fastened.

"Mr. Carstoe," she said, suddenly.

He half jumped from his chair, still staring at her open-mouthed, as he had been doing for several seconds.

"O, I do beg your pardon—I do!" moaned the wretched man.

"But there is no need," she replied, able still to keep her voice steady. "Pray don't worry yourself any more! See, I want you to explain that codicil fully to me. It is not only that I wish to show you I am not annoyed, but I would like you to go over all the details."

Her composure brought him out of his maze, and after a little he grew less vivid in tone (to use an artist's phrase), and was able to speak without tumbling his words over one another.

"I dare say you remember the codicil," Elizabeth said.

"Yes, indeed—word for word; it was so odd you know, that it made a strong im-

pression on my mind. But of course you saw the copy I drew up for Mr. Vaughan?"

"Still, you shall go over it, if you please," was all she said.

With his legal memory for dry facts, stimulated by the romantic interest which the case had always possessed for him, Mr. Carstoe was not likely to be at fault in recalling the codicil. He gave the exact terms as if he had been reading them aloud.

Elizabeth listened to the end, then knew that in her effort to soften her judgment of her husband she had put the possibility of doubt beyond her power. She was not past the capability of suffering where he was concerned: she suffered now, as only a pure, upright nature could have done.

She could not wish that she had remained in ignorance of the truth as to this or other matters. Better to see her idols crushed into the dust than bow before false deities! To her mind, devotion to a false god must be enervating and pernicious, insensibly leading the soul from the right path. How much her stern judgment might have been softened had her heart cried out in defence of the poor clay image from which the shining gauds that wrapped its deformity had one by one been

torn, I cannot tell. But when she married, Elizabeth's feeling for her husband had been hero-worship. The first perception of the difference between the real man and her ideal came too soon for her whole heart to have joined imagination and enthusiasm in that cult.

She suffered keenly enough, but she was not broken-hearted. Her pride was lacerated, her faith stricken, her sense of womanly purity outraged; but the ache was over, the disappointment, the loneliness, the desolation, for she craved love and sympathy; it was not the death-like agony of a heart which bursts under its burden. Suddenly a new thought started up in her mind: the recollection of the words she had this morning spoken to Launce Cromlin. He must believe that she had known the contents of the codicil. What could he have thought of her mentioning it? She understood now his annoyance and surprise: he had believed her vain, coquettish, unwomanly. She felt her face burn with shame and mortification; but a deeper pang followed, for after a little she recollected the after-conversation—the change in his manner. He had comprehended that she only knew what the letter expressed, that the real significance of the codicil had never been explained. This was

almost worse to bear than to have had him deem her silly or unfeminine; for now Darrell Vaughan's baseness was not a secret confined to herself—Cromlin had divined it.

But she heard Mr. Carstoe speaking, and hurried back from her painful reverie.

"Thanks for your patience," she said. "You are right, Mr. Carstoe; your friend is a very generous man."

"Then I haven't vexed you and made mischief after all?" he cried ecstatically. "I am so glad you like him; appreciate him as he deserves. I was sure you would."

This cool, practical man of business—the most commonplace and trusty of mortals in that respect—was, I have told you, an old romance weaver in his way. He would have kept a professional secret even in regard to an enemy with unfaltering caution; but he could not resist the impulse to share with Elizabeth a little secret of another kind. He wanted by every means to soften her heart towards Launce; besides, he was so carried on by the romance of the thing that he could not repress a betrayal which could harm no one, of which Cromlin would never be made aware.

He winked and blinked so portentously that Elizabeth perceived he had something else on

his mind; but it was something agreeable, she could see by his face.

"You look as if you had something pleasant you would like to tell me," she said.

"Yes—I would; only it is a bit of a secret."

"But you know we women are said to like secrets," she answered cheerfully.

"In a way it is," he continued; "nobody told me—it was only by putting two and two together that I made it out."

"Yes," she answered, not interested, but wishing to be good-natured and set him thoroughly at ease after his recent embarrassment.

"You see—only think—Cromlin had seen you before your marriage, Mrs. Vaughan!" said Carstoe eagerly.

"Seen me?" she repeated in surprise.

"Yes; in Switzerland—at Montreux—the very day he got the letter recalling him to America," returned Carstoe, delighted with his idyl. "You had fainted; he carried you up a hill. You must remember—there was a young lady with you."

He waited for her to answer.

"I remember," she said rather coldly. "I did not know it was he."

"No, of course not; that made it so romantic," and Mr. Carstoe fairly beamed. "He had to hurry off to catch the train. Well, poor fellow, after all his haste he was weeks and weeks too late! Just fancy; in New York he saw Vaughan pass in a carriage, but could not make him hear—and Vaughan was driving down to the steamer."

She wished he would stop; she could not have told why the whole story pained her, but it did.

"I told you how ill he was," pursued Carstoe in his voice of pleased mystery. "During his fever he used to talk in a wandering way about that meeting. He remembered the codicil too; and I know he had dreamed as young men will—it was natural."

He waited for an assent, but none was audible.

"When he was better, I showed him a picture of your mother I had found among his uncle's papers—wonderful resemblance to you—and—and—he kept it. Then, just as he was getting able to travel—meaning to go over to Europe, you can guess what for—came the news."

Carstoe paused to shake his head and sigh. "Poor fellow; I carried him the paper myself

—I had no idea what was in it. So then he changed his mind very suddenly, and stayed a long while in California. How hard he did work! And that's all," concluded Carstoe, drawing a long breath. "Quite a little romance, was it not?"

Elizabeth had no opportunity to reply. The door opened, and Vaughan entered.

"Ah, Carstoe," he said, "just the man I wanted to meet! Queenie, dear, I have scarcely seen you to-day! You look rather pale; you stop in the house too much."

He walked up to her chair, stooped, laid one hand caressingly on her shoulder, and kissed her forehead. She neither shrunk nor spoke, but a chill that was like the coldness of death smote her very soul: the touch of his lips seemed an absolute pollution just then.

Mr. Carstoe sat silently watching the two, and again a vague suspicion crossed his mind to see Elizabeth so quiet and unmoved under her handsome husband's evidences of affection. But Vaughan did not appear to notice anything peculiar in her manner.

"Poor Ribston died suddenly this morning of apoplexy," he said. "I shall have to go into harness sooner than I expected."

Ribston was the member of Congress whom

Vaughan would have succeeded the next winter in the natural course of events, but now he would be obliged to go on to Washington for the remainder of the spring session, which might "drag its slow length along" for several months to come.

CHAPTER X.

A LAST APPEAL.

In this age of railways and telegraphs, elopements of any sort are rather prosaic matters, and so Nathalie La Tour discovered when she began to carry into execution her plan for escaping what she considered her husband's insupportable tyranny. But at least there was the secrecy and excitement to give a glow of romance, and Susanne proved an invaluable coadjutor, enjoying the idea of the flight as much as if she had been a youthful heroine going off to join her Romeo.

The first thing was to gain time, so Nathalie took to her bed, because, as Susanne in her wisdom observed,—

"Arguments with men are just breath wasted; they can carry one off whether one scolds or cries; but they can't take one pillow, nightgown, and all, and that is where we have them, the saints be praised."

Nathalie offered no further opposition to her

husband's will. She was sullen and taciturn, acting so well her *rôle* of injured wife, that a more acute person than Monsieur La Tour would have been deceived. The journey to Languedoc was deferred for a week. Suffering as he was in body and mind, the old man pitied Nathalie sincerely, and strove by gentleness and consideration to soften somewhat the verdict he had pronounced. He shut himself up in the house; he could not bear to meet his neighbours' eyes—to feel that they were commiserating him; worse still, were condemning Nathalie. He was stung to the soul by this disgrace which had struck the life he had kept always upright and pure; but terrible as this was, he thought more of Nathalie and her future than of anything else. The man's ideas ran in a narrow channel, restricted by the prejudices of long years; but he thought vigorously enough, and his perception of justice and right was more independent of his prejudices than is that of many men who pride themselves on their broad views and theories in regard to social freedom.

He trusted that time and proper influences might work a great change in Nathalie—teach her the falsity and wickedness of the doctrines he had espoused. His ideas of the ways by

which this teaching was to be effected were utterly erroneous, but he walked by such light as he had. His sister was a woman upright and gentle, whose whole life was a psalm of goodness. He really believed that her example must have its effect on Nathalie, quite forgetting that to his wife's mind psalms had no meaning. Then he had great faith in the advice of a certain Curé who resided near his sister; the books which had helped to disorganize Nathalie's judgment were to be kept out of reach, a course of reasonable literature substituted in their stead.

For himself, nothing could be done. Nathalie did not love him. He could no longer court deception here. For months trust in her affection had been slowly dying out of his heart as the sun fades from a landscape, leaving it each hour colder and more dreary; now the last ray was gone.

While he meditated over the means by which Nathalie might best be aided, and prayed for strength to bear the burden that seemed heavier than his age-weakened shoulders could support, the wife was arranging her flight. She had a considerable sum of money by her; the little income she inherited from her mother was received from funds in Eng-

land—her husband could not touch that; and her books had brought in enough; so that her fancy built glowing hopes for the future.

She wrote to a friend in Paris—a literary woman, whose acquaintance she had made during the memorable spring spent in the enchanted city—one of the band of modern philosophers whose practice went beyond Nathalie's most daring theories. Even in her first excitement it was hard for Nathalie to give up Paris, and there would have been her rightful sphere; life anywhere out of its charmed influences must be dull in comparison. But there could be no safety for her in France; expatriation was the price she must pay for liberty.

Her letter received a speedy answer; Susanne managed its reception with the art of a *soubrette* in an old comedy. The philosopheress was ready to assist her young friend by every means in her power. She had at once seen a publisher in regard to Nathalie's new book. Best of all, she and a party of friends were just setting off to spend the autumn and winter in Italy. Nathalie must join them; break the yoke under which her soul had so long groaned; seek freedom and the companionship of natures able to com-

prehend her exalted needs — natures eager for the regeneration of mankind and the glorious light of liberty, undimmed by the blight of old prejudices and worn-out religious creeds.

These glowingly-expressed theories were all real and beautiful to Nathalie—a gospel to which she clung as tenaciously as a blind man to some vain support which he has convinced himself is his one refuge. She would defer her journey to America for a time. In Italy she should have leisure to translate her novel into English, and make arrangements for its publication in London and New York. Her name would go far and wide; she should have the world at her feet.

But Susanne had no intention of leaving her own or her mistress's wardrobe behind, and she contrived, by the assistance of a friend in the village, to get the principal part out of the house, and sent on the road to Italy.

Monsieur La Tour was so completely exhausted that for a few days he could only lie on his bed in a darkened room, wondering what error in his life had rendered necessary the terrible punishment which now befel him. In the case of another, he could have believed it only a trial sent for the further purification of

the soul, but he was too humble to accept so hopeful a view in his own case.

One morning he woke to know that a fresh blow had fallen—Nathalie was gone.

At Genoa she found her friends awaiting her, and together they journeyed down to Naples. Nathalie's book was published under her own name; the translation she made would appear in England and America in the spring. She fancied herself on the road to fame and fortune, and for a short time believed that happiness was at last reached.

But that winter was not all sunshine. The female philosopher and her band were disappointed in Nathalie; she was good at theory, but beyond this she did not go. The women grew venomous because she took no lover, the men spiteful. Still there was the *éclat* of enrolling this young, lovely, and, in certain ways, gifted creature among their band, and the consolation of having other people believe that her daily life was in keeping with the laxity of morals in her books.

On the whole, Nathalie was glad when spring took the entire set back to France. She had fears of being made a prisoner if she set foot on Gallic soil, so the only course was to reach Ostend by Switzerland and Germany.

The journey was a hard one, and Susanne very troublesome whenever she became fatigued. Nathalie began to think that even the exalted career of a new light teacher was not free from small cares and vexations, and it had been just the trifles in her former life which had seemed so unendurable.

London appeared a howling wilderness to her eyes, and she hated it with a feverish energy, which only French blood can feel in its full extent toward the damp shores of Albion. A few hangers-on of newspapers came about her, a few theatrical people; but there was nothing brilliant—no ovation: not even women to envy her the admiration of the stiff Englishmen she detested. Nathalie felt existence to be as bitter as ever she had done in the dreary house in the French provincial town.

She began to yearn for America. Since Paris was a heaven closed to her, New York looked the next brightest spot, and she waited impatiently for certain money matters to be arranged, so that she might sail.

It was late in June before any fresh excitement came to her, and as Nathalie only counted life by sensations, the time seemed very long. But one morning a packet of news-

papers was brought in. They were several numbers of a semi-monthly journal that had been started in New York, called the *Bohemian*, avowedly the representative of a little set in that city who believed in their own importance, and had not the slightest doubt they were destined to revolutionize the world. Nathalie found long reviews of her books—numerous personal notices—descriptions of her beauty—bits of romantic incident supposed to have been actual experiences in her girlhood—a poem or so which chanted her praises—and eager assertions that America was the field for her genius.

She laid down the papers actually convinced that it was the voice of the whole vast continent which she had heard. At last fame had come! Yes, there was her field of operations—her Elysium! She was a recognized priestess at length, and innumerable worshippers eagerly calling her to appear and occupy the shrine they had erected in her honour. There were letters too—letters from men and women who belonged to the newly-established coterie of Bohemians. There were epistles from youths in poetry and madder prose, declaring the ardent love with which she had inspired them. Their souls called her

soul across the vasty deep, and so on; the plain English for which would have been, that as the worshippers possessed no money for the voyage, she must float within their reach if she desired to test their devotion.

In addition to these eloquent communications, she received a letter from the leading proprietor of the *Bohemian*. He proposed that she should come to America, buy a share in the newspaper, and assist in conducting it. Between her books and her editorial influence she would be able to accomplish the grandest work that the age could offer any woman.

The newspaper itself reiterated this last assertion, declaring that she was the true apostle for whom the world had been waiting—her genius the immaterial divinity for which true souls had sighed so long!

In truth, he was a sufficiently shrewd man this chief owner of the lever that was to move the universe. The journal could not live much longer without assistance, and Nathalie's moneyed success had been as much overrated as such successes usually are. This philosopher, with a practical vein under his theories, and a keen eye to interest beneath his floating locks and dreamy brow, saw clearly all the advantages of electing this handsome woman

(who could come with a well-filled purse in her pretty fingers) the anointed Queen of the Bohemians. That was the title the newspaper offered her: it sounded very sweet in Nathalie's ears as she repeated it over and over.

She must answer the letters at once! Her brain was so dizzy and her hand so tremulous that she could scarcely write. This was the happiest hour of her life—she had found her throne and crown!

The first thing was to secure the newspaper. The long-headed philosopher had spoken of the necessity for a speedy acceptance if she decided to join in the great work. There was an American woman with talent, money, and influence, eager to be chosen as sovereign, and she had a clique to support her claims. But to him, the long-haired philosopher, and to all the furthest-sighted of the band, there could be no doubt—they wanted Nathalie. Still (here he showed talent which his printed writings seldom exhibited), a certain portion of the contract money must be forthcoming without delay, in order to crush the hopes of the New York literary lady and her faction. He explained clearly how the affair could be arranged through a publishing house in London.

But eager as she was, Nathalie's usual lack of continuity of thought caused a new idea to strike her in the midst of her reply. She must write to the poetess who had honoured her with an epistle. What she considered an apt quotation from Mrs. Browning suggested itself, so she preluded her rhodomontade with—

"How dreary 'tis for women to sit still
On winter nights by solitary fires,
And hear the nations praising them afar."

Then she paused to read the newspaper tributes again, wishing for an auditor to share her triumph. Susanne would be better than nobody! At least Susanne would express unqualified delight, even if she did show it by standing on one foot and uttering incoherent phrases.

But when she rang she found that Susanne had gone out; the lodging-house servant said a gentleman had just called. Nathalie supposed it must be some literary acquaintance—perhaps a person connected with the press, who could get mention into London journals of this success which her genius had achieved. Indeed, it might be a friend who had already heard of her triumph, and was come to offer

congratulations. She bade the woman show the guest up at once.

The door opened again; Nathalie looked down the dimness of the dull grey room and saw her husband standing there, like a ghost among the shadows.

She uttered a cry of fear. Her first impulse was to flee. He had found her; she might be dragged back to the purgatory of her old existence just in this crowning moment of success.

"Nathalie," he called, in a slow, tremulous voice; "do not be frightened, Nathalie."

"I'll not go back!" she cried. "I'll kill myself first! Never, never; don't come near me; don't try to touch me!"

He had advanced half-way up the room, but he stopped at the sound of the wild words and the sight of her frightened face.

"I have no power over you," he said; "think a moment, and you will remember that."

She sat down in a chair, trembling still from the effects of her terror, but able to recollect that out of France he had no authority whatever. Then a sudden anger took the place of her fright; but as she turned toward him with insolent words on her lips, they died unuttered.

Somehow, to look into his face was like looking into the possibility of a life which made her hopes and dreams show shrunken and deformed. The idea was too vague for her to seize it—indeed, her vanity and her warped mind would have rendered this impossible; but the thrill shook her—only long enough to check that cruel speech—then was gone.

He stood there with his head a little bowed —how white his hair had grown!—with his eyes fixed upon her. O the piteous hopelessness of that glance! Everything in his attitude and appearance aided the inner voice which had tried to make itself audible to her blinded soul—the vision which had sought to lighten the darkness where she groped; but she was deaf and blind alike to all.

"I don't know what you want; I can't see why you should come!" she exclaimed fretfully.

Had she ever contemplated this meeting, she would have fancied herself equal to the emergency; proud, haughty, like a priestess confronting a heretic who had come to attack her altar. But she was taken by surprise, and could only wail out a peevish remonstrance.

"I think you should know, Nathalie," he

answered gently. "Whenever I could learn where you were I have written."

"I never read one of your letters," she broke in; and again was conscious that she had not assumed the tone fitting her dignity as the acknowledged apostle of a new faith, and paused.

"I wish you had done so," he continued. "I am not eloquent, but you might have seen my heart, perhaps, and felt that at least I wanted to help you."

"Help me—you!" she cried scornfully.

She saw him tremble a little.

"May I sit down?" he asked. "I am getting old, you know, and the long journey has tired me."

She ran and placed a chair for him; she could feel sorry to see how pale and worn he looked, though her pity roused no pang of remorse. Her intense egoism precluded the possibility of her seeing that she had erred. All faults were on his side. She was a victim, not so much from his deliberate causing, as from the tyranny of ancient creeds and laws, but she was a victim.

"I wish you had not come; it would have been so much better not!" she heard herself saying in the same fretful tone, wondering at

the same time why she felt childish and weak, and could get at none of the grand phrases with which she would have expected to overwhelm him.

As he seated himself, he took her hand—gently, but so firmly that she could not release it, and looking in her face again with his sorrowful eyes, said,—"Nathalie, do you ever pray?"

Straightway there rose before her the memory of her mother's last hours, that awful death-bed, the dying woman's agony of supplication and fear, her calls upon Virgin and saints—and Nathalie shuddered.

He let her hand go; she got to a seat near, and sank into it. She turned her gaze from his face—it was an effort to do so—and fixed it on the letters and newspapers. Her courage came back; her spirit rose indignantly at this temporary assertion of power by the old superstitions and mummeries in which she had no faith.

"To live for the beautiful and true is prayer," she cried; "to keep the soul free from superstitions; to reach forward to the ideal, to the living centre of magnetic influence. But you cannot understand; why do I speak?"

"Let us then talk of things in which we can understand one another," he answered.

Nathalie shrugged her shoulders. She wanted to make a comparison about some dull, slow, creeping thing presuming to imagine it could comprehend a bird soaring and singing above its head, but she was still sufficiently softened by the wave of emotion which had touched her to refrain.

"I made the journey on purpose to see you, Nathalie," he continued. "I should have gone to you in Italy when I heard you were there, but I was very—I was not just fit to travel."

She knew that he had been prevented by severe illness; but somehow to feel this irritated her, as did his checking himself in the mention of it through consideration for her.

"I wish you had left everything as it was," she said. "I cannot think why you came! I shall never go back; you ought to have known that. Go back? As well ask a skylark not to fly when it has learned to use its wings. There, it is all said now; do not let us talk of it! I have no wish to say harsh things, but I will not be reproached or lectured; I am free."

She felt herself very magnanimous to speak with such mildness.

"Will you let me tell you why I came—

exactly what thoughts were in my mind?" he asked gently.

"O tell me then," she replied, with a sort of fretful resignation.

"All those weeks when I was prevented seeking you I had time to think," he continued in the same subdued, patient tone. "You are very young, Nathalie. Many things will look so different to you when you reach my age."

Nathalie shivered, only at the idea of growing old. The thought of age was hateful to her. It was dreadful to look at him and remember that some time she must be thus—bowed, wrinkled, grey-haired. She called it cruelty on his part to force such reflections upon her mind. "The idea of coming all the way from France to talk of that!" she said angrily.

"Only because it has to do with what I want to say. Don't be impatient, Nathalie! I am slow; I do not explain myself well. Let me try to tell what I mean in a few words."

He was about to make the offer against which his priest had warned him as dangerous for his own soul—what the Curé called condoning sin and crime; the offer which his sister had implored him to relinquish, because if he

succeeded in the errand he would only bring new and harder suffering upon the last years of his earthly life. But plain and commonplace as he was, narrowed as his mind had become from living in the little round which education and example had taught him to consider the only safe one, Monsieur La Tour could rise above these restraints, because his love for Nathalie was strong enough to thrust self aside. He paused, not because the opportunity to plead his wishes brought up any selfish consideration, only to try for words which should be most likely to influence her.

"Well?" cried Nathalie sharply. She had glanced back at the newspapers and letters. She longed to return to her pleasant task. It was too bad to have her time wasted; to be dragged down to earth by such antiquated talk when she was eager to soar off into the realms of transcendentalism and latter-day philosophy.

"If you would be content to stay with me —to let me be like a father to you. Wait Nathalie,"—for she had made an impatient movement to rise,—"I do not mean you to go back to the old home—we would live where you chose. I would only ask you to wait awhile—to study—to think before you published any more books—to examine well the

doctrines which seem so beautiful and broad to you—before you help further to promulgate them—"

"Stop now?" she broke in. "Why, do you know what position I have already won for myself—my books translated—my name famous? Read these!"

She ran to the table, seized the newspapers, and brought them to him.

"I don't need to look at them," he said. "O child, child, can you not understand! This is not fame."

She smiled at him with a grand compassion, she could not even be angry. He was utterly blind, earthly, soulless. Outside the crime of having married her, he was a good enough plain creature. She had shaken off her bonds —she was free! She could afford to look leniently down on him from the height to which she had risen.

"You ask impossibilities," she said. "I could not wait if I would! Destiny has pushed me on—my work lies before me—I must do it."

"God have mercy on your soul!" he murmured.

"Bigot!" retorted she, and went back to place her precious papers upon the table. She

stood resting one hand upon it, and glanced toward him. Nathalie could undergo numerous emotions and changes in an instant. She felt sorry for him, because he must be deprived of her society—that seemed, indeed, a terrible punishment for his error in having made her his wife. She must have married somebody and been wretched—it was her destiny—else how could she have successfully preached against the miseries of wedlock? She recollected a verse of English poetry about suffering and song and crushed grapes and wine, but it was not worth while to quote it to Monsieur, whose comprehension of the language was limited to the utterance of a few phrases whereby man, the animal, makes known the needs of his stomach.

And Monsieur looked at her and realized how helpless he was to fulfil the mission which had brought him, and with his usual humility blamed himself. If he could only speak as he ought—if he could only find eloquent words which should be like a sudden light whereby she might see the dangerous precipice on whose edge she stood! His own pain he could bear —he was old and ugly and dull—it did not matter! But this creature, so full of youth and loveliness, it was awful to think of the

future she must bring upon herself, the harm she might do others.

Most men in his position, cheated of their love,—horrified by the distasteful notoriety brought on their name,—would have had their opinions too warped by passion not to give the harshest colour to Nathalie's conduct, believing that in theory and practice she was alike depraved. But this man, narrow as many of his ideas were, did not do this; he was capable of the heroism of putting himself out of the question; and when a human being can accomplish this, his judgment of a fellow-creature is a very different matter.

"If I could say what I ought!" he exclaimed suddenly.

She shrugged her shoulders with impatience. Why would he not go, and let her alone? Her mind was full of herself again; these letters to answer, this brilliant offer to accept, the first taste of fame to indulge, and here he was dragging her down to commonplace discussions, just as if she were still a slave, sitting in the old prison of a house in France, and liberty only a dream.

"We can neither speak a language the other is able to comprehend," she said magnificently. "I have no desire to say unkind

things, but I wish you would go away, Monsieur."

He rose.

"Yes," he said, "I weary you, I have always wearied you. Wherever I have been wrong, Nathalie, I beg your pardon."

"Never mind," she answered; "I do not blame you now. In the daily irritation and misery of my life, when the chain that bound me galled my soul always, I was excitable and impatient; but that is all over."

"O Nathalie!" he cried; "think — only think! Remember what the world will say and believe of you; what it says of your associates, of those women who—"

"Haven't I told you that it does not matter?" she broke in. "We expect persecution and misapprehension from the common herd—all reformers must. Why that very faith to which you cling,—worn out as it is,—did not its first proselytes struggle even to martyrdom in its support? Do you think I am less brave?"

This unconscious blasphemy was terrible to the poor old man. He held up his hand, saying sadly,—

"Not that, Nathalie! Say anything else you will, but let my religion alone."

He saw now that the case was hopeless; he could not move her in any way. His sister had been right: this visit had no effect but to bring him a new pang—a keener suffering: he had better go. It was a horrible alternative, but be had no choice. His own misery, the utter wreck she had made of his closing years, he could have borne, but his agony went beyond personal feelings. He had struggled for Nathalie's soul against the tempter and been worsted. To him it was not only that in her madness she risked honour and reputation here, but he believed in eternal happiness or eternal punishment! He dared not think; he could only shut his eyes and pray God to send a ray of light before it was too late.

"If you should ever want me, Nathalie," he said at last, "you will know where to find me. You will come?"

"O yes," she replied indifferently. "I do not dislike you. Now that we are free from one another I can judge you more leniently."

"In God's sight we can never be free from one another," he said solemnly.

"Rank nonsense!" exclaimed Nathalie. "If you only would read my last book There is no answer to my arguments if you go by the light of reason; but you would not!

You only see by what you call faith, and there is nothing that so enfeebles the judgment! To doubt is the right, the loftiest attribute of the mind!"

He would go! To linger only increased his distress for her—always for her.

"One thing more," he said. "I have arranged with a banker here to pay you an annual sum in addition to your income; I have made it as large as my duty to others would permit."

"O, very well. One must think of money as one must of other coarse needs of the body," she replied grandly.

She stood waiting for him to go; she did not want to be softened by further appeals.

"And is this farewell?" he asked, after a brief silence.

"Our paths separate unavoidably," she said. "I have a great work before me; I cannot be trammelled in any way."

"O Nathalie, Nathalie!" he cried, in a voice sharp with agony. "Come to me, child; come! For your soul's sake—by your mother's memory—by that death-bed, I implore you to come!"

She shivered and grew frightened anew, but this weakness only angered her.

"Let me alone!" she exclaimed. "I am not a child to be scared by such folly; let me alone! I will not go back; I will not! Say another word and I shall hate you as bad as ever! I'll do anything, no matter what, just to make it impossible for you to come any more with such silly offers."

"You are right," he answered; "it is useless to trouble you. I am going now, Nathalie; I am going."

Again he gave her a long, yearning look; he loved her so! He had gone through his youth, past middle age, and love had never come to him till he met this wayward girl; and now she had broken his heart and was endangering her own soul.

His gaze troubled her; she wanted him gone. It was not that she was too hard-hearted to pity his suffering, but she could not understand it. He was old; love could have no meaning to him, and to expect to fetter her genius and youth down to his petty life was an insanity fairly ludicrous.

"Farewell, Nathalie," he said; "farewell."

He held her hands for an instant; she heard his lips murmur a broken prayer; then he went slowly out of the room, looking wistfully back to the last, as if there still lingered a hope

that she might relent, might bid him return; then the door closed.

Nathalie cried a little from nervous excitement, but the sight of the papers and letters soon restored her composure, and she forgot him in her engrossing occupation.

After awhile Susanne entered in a state of intense excitement; she had seen Monsieur in the street, had hurried round a corner to escape, and flew home to warn her mistress.

"But he has been here," said Nathalie. "Bah! Don't weary me with such trifles, Susanne! Listen to this; let me translate these reviews and letters. O Susanne, I am famous at last!"

CHAPTER XI.

COME TO LIGHT.

AUTUMN was come again.

In the spring Elizabeth had gone to Washington with her husband, when he took his seat in Congress. Some measure, momentous for the time, whatever might be its effect on the future about which Conscript Fathers talked so eloquently, was occupying the attention of both Houses. Vaughan's first speech was in regard to this Bill, and proved a great success.

Try to shut her eyes as she might, Elizabeth could not help knowing that Vaughan fought against his convictions in the interest of his party; but she presumed to pass no judgment. She saw other men, called good and great, doing this daily. If such action was a necessity of politics, she could only feel that another illusion had vanished—another barrier been set up between her and any possibility of sympathy with her husband's career.

Vaughan worked hard, and Elizabeth was aware that his recourse to stimulants had begun anew. At this time she felt obliged to speak, but the result was only what she had feared. Darrell, enraged at her discovery, punished her in a thousand painful ways for her "prying insolence"—the name he gave her attempt at expostulation.

The summer was spent at their country seat, with the house always full of guests. In September Elizabeth went to visit her old aunt, Janet Crauford, and Darrell received an invitation to attend the Chief Magistrate and Cabinet upon one of those "presidential tours" which have grown into a custom of late years, and prove more expensive than a "royal progress," under their republican name.

Toward the middle of October the husband and wife again met at their house in town.

It was hard for Elizabeth to be patient in these days. Life had closed about her so circumscribed, so narrow, that she felt like one shut in a cell into which there could only enter just air enough to prevent suffocation. Disappointed in her dreams,—thwarted in her aims,—not even allowed to make a rightful use of the fortune which she regarded as a stewardship,—bound to the man through

whom these and other troubles came, and forced into the knowledge that greed and avarice contended in his soul with darker vices, which were dragging him so rapidly down, that soon the hollow fabric of his reputation must crumble, and he lose the one restraint which could keep him from deeper degradation—the approving verdict of the world.

She endeavoured to learn the lesson of not looking forward—sought to live each day by itself; trying to see how she might best use this discipline for the development of her own soul. But this was a pain too; it seemed so petty thus to concentrate life upon herself; it was sad to think she had not been considered worthy to be of use in her day and generation.

She was young still, and grand dreams are so natural at her age!

She visited her hospital,—attended to the wants of her poor,—went into society, since her position rendered this a duty,—and so time wore on. What would come after? Over and over she asked herself this question—asked it as hopelessly as the young do when existence closes about them, dull, purposeless, and grey, and no efforts, no struggles, can

show a path toward the light. But she tried to bear—tried to be patient.

At least her home was just now untroubled by angry words or contentions. Vaughan had returned in one of his most genial moods. He was immersed in business, but the men she saw about him at this time gave her a hope that for awhile, at least, his habits of dissipation were kept in abeyance by the engrossing interests of politics and the numberless other schemes in which he was engaged.

Launce Cromlin also came back. He meant to sail for Europe toward winter, and various matters demanded his presence in New York before setting out on this journey, from which he might not return for years. Vaughan went to see him, insisted on being friendly, inviting him to the house with such urgency, and causing Elizabeth to add her persuasions, that Launce could not refuse without downright rudeness. The quiet and hard work of the past months had helped him to overcome the feverish restlessness which beset him in the spring. He could meet Elizabeth, confident that no wrong thought, no weak grieving over thwarted possibilities, troubled his mind. Then, too, he was going away; half their lives might pass before they should meet again.

Mr. Carstoe was still in town, but he had nearly completed the business which Vaughan had entrusted to his charge, and would soon return to his post in California. His society always cheered Elizabeth, and was a great pleasure to the solitary woman. She had grown attached to the quiet elderly man. He was so honest, so straightforward, so earnest and good in his simplicity, that his visits came like a breath of fresh mountain air into the close, vitiated atmosphere of her life.

Then Vaughan was called away by business. Some difficulty had arisen in regard to the title to a tract of land which he owned in Virginia, and it was necessary to attend personally to the matter.

He had been gone ten days, when one morning a letter from him was brought to Elizabeth as she sat alone in her favourite room. He seldom wrote now-a-days during his absences unless there was a necessity therefor. She opened the envelope and found a hastily-written note, beginning with a decorous "Dear Queenie," and going at once into the business details she had expected to find—following by good wishes for her health, a hope that she was amusing herself, and winding all up with the information that he was "her affectionate husband."

There was food for mournful meditation in the epistle, just from what it lacked. Whatever may be the circumstances which have caused the estrangement, the desert is, indeed, reached when husband and wife are only kept together by a community of worldly interest, a regard for the decencies of life, or a sense of duty: perhaps they suffer most who are detained by the latter bond.

But Elizabeth had often enough thought of these things: she was glad that just now she lacked leisure. She hastened to put the letter out of sight and attend to the request it contained. Darrell needed certain deeds and papers; he hoped that by aid of these the people might be induced to compromise and prevent the necessity of a lawsuit. He told her where she would find a number of keys, which boxes she was to open, the engrossing whereby she would recognize the documents. To read the directions one would have supposed Vaughan the most methodical of men; but Elizabeth had too often had experience of strange lapses of memory on his part to be much surprised when, after patient search, the papers were not discovered in either of the trunks he mentioned.

These boxes, along with a variety of others,

were in a light closet off Vaughan's dressing-room. It was possible she might find the papers in some other trunk. Several of them were not locked—their contents unimportant; nothing, at least, like the documents he had described. Then she perceived an old packing-case; this was locked; none of the keys she had brought were of use. She went to her chamber, took a bunch of her own keys, and at last succeeded in opening the trunk.

It had belonged to old Mr. Vaughan; his name was on the lid; there were various packages of papers in his writing. Everything connected with the dead man's memory was precious to Elizabeth. She turned over the contents with a carefulness which, had her husband seen, would have called forth a contemptuous smile for what he would have termed a bit of sentimental folly: perhaps it was such; but it is not a bad thing for any human being to possess the capability for that sort of romantic sentiment.

There were numerous deeds among the great mass of documents, pamphlets, and similar matters which filled the trunk, but those Darrell wanted were not there. She had taken everything out; there was a heavy writing-desk and other articles not easy to lift, but she called no assistance, knowing how great was her hus-

band's dislike to have any one meddle with his papers. Nothing but an urgent need could have induced him to commission her to search among them. But the deeds were not there. She put the contents back, and was closing the trunk when she perceived a little box that had fallen out; it was tied about with a cord: she had no hesitation in opening it because it had belonged to old Mr. Vaughan. It might be some relic that would be pleasant to keep. She had discovered a variety of trifles—a seal, a carved paper-cutter, and the like, which she meant to retain. So she opened the box, raised the cotton which lay next the lid, and the gleam of jewels caught her eye. There were a quantity of unset diamonds, a stud, a ring, and a large emerald. Elizabeth knew enough about gems to be certain that these were valuable; the ring struck her fancy from its quaint setting. She put it on her finger and took the box to her own room.

Her maid chanced to enter at the moment, and raised her hands and voice in horror at her mistress's appearance.

"Only look in the glass," moaned Margot; "only look."

Elizabeth did look and could not help laughing; her dressing-gown was decorated with

festoons of dust, and her face adorned in the same fashion. She hastened to dress, that she might write to Darrell and tell him how unsuccessful her search had been; but before she began her letter there came a telegram. She was not surprised on opening it to find a message that Darrell had discovered the papers among those he had taken with him.

These lapses of memory, which would have been the merest trifles in the case of another, had a painful significance to Elizabeth when Vaughan was concerned; for she knew their cause, and she knew too that they, like other symptoms which proved the baleful effects of the poison to which he yielded more and more, were increasing rapidly. It was so dreadful to do nothing; to sit still, and see the man rush on to destruction,—and yet she was powerless; pleading or expostulation from her only made him worse.

They came to tell her that visitors were below. She went down to receive them; spent a half-hour in that frivolous talk which is so inexpressibly wearisome when one has heart and brain full of anxieties and cares.

Just as these guests were taking their leave, Launce Cromlin was announced. He did not often visit her, but it was always a pleasure to

see him come; it was a little lifting of the dull mist which closed over her life to talk with Launce, to see some one who lived in the higher world of work and art in which her dreaming girlhood had been spent.

She was playing to him, and he standing by the piano; chancing to look down at her hands, he noticed the ring, which she had forgotten. Later he spoke of it, and she drew it from her finger, and handed it to him.

"It is very quaint, is it not?" she said.

"Yes," he answered. "It is an old Spanish setting; you may occasionally find such in California: they came, I suppose, from Mexico —nobody knows how old they may be. I suppose you picked this up in Europe?"

"No; it belonged—at least I think it must have done—to your uncle."

Then she told him about her discovery of the box of jewels—went to her room, and brought them for him to look at. They both arrived at the same conclusion in regard to the stones—that old Mr. Vaughan had purchased them in California; they had been put aside, and had escaped Darrell's notice, if, indeed, he had ever examined the trunk.

"Probably Mr. Carstoe sent that trunk because he saw it contained papers and deeds,"

Launce said, "and neither he nor Vaughan ever examined its contents carefully."

While they were still looking at the gems, a servant came in with a message from Mr. Carstoe—he wished to know if Mrs. Vaughan could receive him. Kindly as Elizabeth treated him, he was always careful in his humility not to trespass upon her goodness. This cordial friendship she showed him was the most beautiful thing that had come into his commonplace existence for years and years. He felt as if a lovely flower-garden had suddenly opened beside the narrow, wearisome path he had so long trodden with patient feet, and he could not enough marvel at God's graciousness in allowing the dullness of his way to be thus brightened.

As Elizabeth moved forward to receive him, holding out her hand with her customary friendliness, he caught sight of the gleaming circlet upon her finger. Its resemblance to that ring which was connected with one of the most painful episodes of his life was a mere chance, of course, but it set him thinking of that time. Between the reflections thus called up, and the usual confusion which beset him on entering any feminine presence, he became so nervous that Elizabeth began to talk on the first sub-

ject that suggested itself, and Launce good-naturedly tried to aid her in restoring the shy man to composure.

Elizabeth was absently turning the ring about on her finger, and the action reminded Launce that he still held the open box of jewels in his hand.

"See, Carstoe," he said, "what Mrs. Vaughan found this morning among some old papers of my uncle's."

He moved to Carstoe's side, holding out the box; a ray of sunlight struck the gems, and their radiance flashed full in the startled eyes of the old man.

"And this ring," Elizabeth added, drawing the jewel from her finger, and adding it to the contents of the box.

At the same instant a servant entered; Mr. Vaughan's lawyer had called, and desired to see her at once. She made a hasty excuse, and left the room, without noticing the look of horror that had paled Carstoe's face, or the amazement with which Cromlin stood regarding him.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Launce, as the door closed. "Are you ill? You're as white as a ghost."

Carstoe extended his trembling hand, and

took the box. He held it for a little, staring down at the gems, which flashed out rainbow hues in the sunlight, speechless and immovable. Launce spoke again, but he did not answer—evidently did not hear. Presently he let his hand sink upon one knee, as if the tiny box had been some heavy weight which he could with difficulty support. Launce stood still and watched him, utterly confounded. It was not a sudden illness that had seized the man; in some way the jewels were connected with this inexplicable agitation.

Carstoe lifted the ring and examined it closely. His face was that of one who had stumbled unwittingly upon some dreadful discovery, and was trying to doubt the evidence of his own senses. He laid the ring upon the broad chair-arm at length, and began taking up the jewels, diamond after diamond. He spread them all out upon the palm of his hand —stones noticeable from their size and purity.

There were also several immense yellow diamonds of unusual lustre, and a great emerald with a tiny nick upon one of the edges. They shone and flashed, and Launce gazed wonderingly from the gems to the white face, and back to the glittering baubles that sent forth new gleams with every movement of the shaking hand.

"Carstoe!" he exclaimed again, fairly terrified by the horror which gathered more heavily on the wrinkled countenance.

"Take them away," Carstoe groaned; "get them out of my sight! I thought I was crazy at first—I wish I had been; O, I wish I had been."

Launce brushed the jewels from Carstoe's hand into the box, and shut the cover over them.

"Do tell me what is the matter!" he pleaded.

"I want to go—let me get away," returned Carstoe, in the same slow, unnatural voice. "I can't see her again yet; say I was ill—anything. And O, Launce Cromlin, bid her put them away—hide them—never let them see the light; don't forget that—don't forget!"

He had almost reached the door before Launce could do anything but stare at him in dumb wonder. Then he hurried forward, saying,—

"Let me walk to the hotel with you, Carstoe—you are not well, you oughtn't to go alone."

"Stay where you are," returned Carstoe, in a sharp, imperative tone, that one would not have believed his voice could utter. "You

must tell her something—she mustn't suspect —you 're quick-witted enough,—O use your wits to some purpose. There 's need, for I can't think—I must get away before she comes."

"What do you want me to tell her?" asked Launce, holding fast to his sleeve.

"Haven't I said? To shut them up—hide them; never to let any human creature see them," whispered Carstoe, shaking from head to foot till he fairly tottered to and fro. "Be careful how you do it; don't let her think there 's any reason! Say he might not like it; say I could not wait. Take care what you do, Launce Cromlin; there mustn't any trouble come near her; she has enough to bear, God help her. Somehow I understand a great deal that I was blind not to have seen before."

He pulled his arm from Launce's hold, and went out of the room, motioning the young man impatiently back when he would have followed.

Launce sat down, still holding the box of jewels, and waited for Elizabeth to return, feeling as dazed and astray as people usually do when some bit of mysterious tragedy forces itself suddenly out across the decorous monotony of existence.

CHAPTER XII.

HOLDING COUNSEL.

Two days elapsed before Cromlin saw Mr. Carstoe. He called several times at the hotel, but the clerks told him the gentleman was unwell, and had given directions that no visitors should be admitted to his room. At last Launce grew too anxious to support the uncertainty longer, and absolutely forced his way to the chamber. Mr. Carstoe was up and dressed, and sitting by a window, but he looked as changed as if a long illness had wasted him.

"I couldn't endure it," Launce said, as he entered. "You must excuse my forcing your door, Mr. Carstoe, but I was too anxious about you to stop for etiquette."

"I am glad you have come," Carstoe replied, holding out his hand. "I was going to send for you. I have thought and thought —I can't see my way clear! Launce Cromlin, you 're an honest man; you must help me to do what is right."

"He did not speak with any excitement; his voice was weak and languid—in keeping with his appearance. Launce sat down by him, retaining the worn hand, and pressing it with gentle firmness. It gave the tired man a sensation of strength, that vigorous young grasp upon his weary muscles. He looked up and smiled.

"You don't need any one to help you do right," Launce answered, speaking cheerfully. "But if easing your mind a little will do you any good, then talk to me. Something that troubles you is making you ill; this is no bodily ailment."

"No, I'm well enough," Carstoe answered. "It's an awful thing, Launce Cromlin, to have your faith in somebody you 've trusted knocked away at one blow! And I was so proud of his friendship—not so fond as I got to be of you during that long illness; but I honoured and respected him so; and now—"

He passed his disengaged hand across his eyes and sat silent for a little.

"Of whom are you speaking?" Launce asked; but he knew who was meant. He tried to get away from the conviction, feeling as if it rose out of his own suspicions, out of a desire to believe the worst of Darrell

Vaughan; all the same he knew that it was Darrell of whom Mr. Carstoe spoke.

"It seems like an ugly dream yet," Carstoe continued, "for all I have thought of nothing else two whole nights and days. What did you say to her? Did she ask why I did not wait?"

"Eh—Mrs. Vaughan! O yes. I told her you had not time."

"I had a note from her this morning," Carstoe said.

He took from his breast-pocket the dainty *billet* and gave it to Launce. It was a pleasure to hold the violet-scented sheet, to read the kindly words of inquiry. Suddenly Launce became sensible of this feeling, and laid the paper down on the table. It was a little thing, but just so resolutely did he put every forbidden thought and feeling in regard to this woman out of his mind.

"Such a dear, sweet letter; so like her, "Mr. Carstoe said. "She's an angel, that girl, Launce Cromlin; I feel a better man for knowing her. And God knows what is in store for her!"

"I think she would tell you not to be afraid just because God does know," Launce replied softly.

The old man's words filled him with a keen anxiety, the more painful from their very vagueness; yet somehow the comforting words came to his lips—uttered themselves, as it were—as if Elizabeth had prompted them.

"Yes," sighed Carstoe; "I'm an old heathen; I keep forgetting that!" Then he asked eagerly,—"Did you tell her—the—the jewels, you know—did you warn her to put them away?"

"O yes; I said she had better."

"But not in a way to trouble her—to make her think there was anything amiss?"

"No; I am sure not. I said perhaps Darrell had picked them up as a present for her, and had forgotten to have them set. He would feel disappointed if he found she had anticipated him; she had spoken of doing that."

"Yes; and she put them away—all of them?"

Launce nodded. He was thinking how sad she looked, sad and startled, when he spoke of Darrell's having forgotten, and wondering what the look meant. He did not know what a signification his words had to her ears. Those old lapses of memory to which Vaughan was becoming more and more subject filled her mind with alarm at the possibilities they suggested.

"If they only had not been found!" he heard Mr. Carstoe say. "I don't see any good it can do. What was the use of my knowing? I'm growing an old man; it's very hard to have such a blow."

Launce could not bring himself to ask a single question further; he had no desire to pry into any of Darrell's secrets—no wish to have further confirmation that his opinion of the man was a just one. He was going away soon; he and Darrell might not meet half-a-dozen times during the remainder of their lives. Whatever this discovery was that had so terribly shocked Carstoe, he would prefer not to hear it. But after an instant his companion continued,—

"But you must help me to do what is right, Cromlin; you must help me to do what is right."

"I will do anything I can—I have told you that," Launce answered almost impatiently. In spite of himself he was to be forced to sit in judgment on Darrell, and he felt as if he were doing the man a wrong, since he came with strong prejudices in favour of his guilt, no matter what the case might be. "I don't know that you ought to ask my advice either," he continued hastily. "See here, Mr. Carstoe

—it is something connected with Vaughan, with my cousin, that troubles you. Now I'm inclined always to think ill of him—to put harsh constructions on his actions; so, after all, I am not a fit person to counsel with."

"Yes, it is about Vaughan," Mr. Carstoe replied slowly. "Your likes or dislikes can't make any difference; it is too plain a case. If I need not believe—if there were any way of—I'm behaving absurdly—excuse me—really my head is so disturbed I think I don't quite know what I say."

"You are worn out from lack of sleep, and staying shut up in the house," Launce said kindly.

"Why I believe even yet you don't get near the truth—you don't suspect what it is he has done," exclaimed Carstoe.

"I have not the slightest idea. I know so little about Vaughan's affairs—"

He paused; Carstoe had leaned forward, pressing his hand on Launce's knee—it was pitiable to see the fresh horror and pain which came into his face.

"You remember about my loss in California," he said, in a voice that was little more than a whisper. "The jewels that were stolen from me—the—"

"Good God!" cried Launce.

"Those diamonds that Mrs. Vaughan showed us were the stones I lost!"

Launce sank back in his chair, his face grown as pale as Carstoe's own, and for a few seconds the two men stared dumbly in each other's eyes.

"Why I can't understand!" muttered Launce at last. "A portion of the diamonds were found in the woman's possession—"

Carstoe interrupted him by taking a little paper from his pocket; he unfolded it, and held up a crescent-shaped diamond stud.

"Do you recognize this?" he asked.

"Yes; it was with the diamonds. How did you get it?"

"It is the mate to the one you saw—the one that was hidden among Darrell Vaughan's things: this is the stud we found on the woman when she was searched," returned Carstoe, in the same repressed, awe-stricken voice.

"You are sure—you can't be mistaken?"

"You know I cannot—you know I would give my right hand to find out that I was! If it had been only the unset stones—but the studs—the ring—couldn't you swear to that ring anywhere, though you have only seen it once?"

"Yes—it is so peculiar."

"And the yellow diamonds—the emerald with the nick in the edge: see, this is the description of them I gave at the time."

He took up an old newspaper from a bundle of letters that lay on the table, and gave it to Launce. It contained an account of the trial. Launce read it through. Then a new horror started up amid the confusion and trouble of his brain.

"Have you thought," he said, "that woman is innocent? She has been four years in prison, and she is innocent."

"Great heavens!" groaned Carstoe, "I have thought until I seem to have almost lost my senses! Cromlin, you remember my telling you of your uncle's sudden attack—of this woman's coming to visit him just before?"

"She had gone to him about Darrell," Launce said.

"Yes! Vaughan must have known it. Either she held some secret of his, and he was afraid of her, or he did it out of revenge; but Darrell Vaughan stole those jewels that day he went to my room. He put the stud in the woman's dress while she was under the influence of some drug—his evidence sent her to prison! There, I have thought it over and over,

but I cannot get away from the facts; nor can you."

"But to keep the diamonds—"

"He dared not sell them! He put them in the safest possible place; there was scarcely a chance of their ever being found; and after all he has betrayed himself."

"But what is to be done?"

"Haven't I asked myself the question till I'm dizzy and sick? Yes; what is to be done?"

He bent his head upon the table, and groaned aloud.

For many moments Launce sat immersed in thought. His powers of reflection were not disturbed, as poor Carstoe's had been during these weary days and nights, by any shock to his heart—the pain of discovering that one he had trusted and honoured was a villain. He had long known that Darrell was this; whatever suspicions he might have entertained of his cousin's utter worthlessness had become convictions during his stay in California.

It was not alone a desire for revenge which had prompted that infernal plot against the woman; she had known some secret, and he had conceived the idea of this charge, not only to get her out of his way for the time, but to

render any revelation she might ever attempt without weight.

And during these dreadful years she had languished in prison, and the man had gone serenely on his path, courted, triumphant, untroubled by a single memory of his hapless victim. Strict justice demanded that this man should be given up to the punishment due to his crime; but Launce never for an instant contemplated the possibility of acting thus. Right or not, it was simply a thing impossible to do. It might be tampering with justice, it might be wrong, but Darrell must be shielded from the consequences of his crime. And the woman—the unfortunate creature who at some time had been in some fashion linked with the man's tortuous, evil life! She must be set free: that must be accomplished at any cost, and with the least possible delay. When he thought of her, Launce's indignation rose hotly; and as his fancy painted the picture of that wretched creature wearing out the last remnant of her youth in a prison cell; losing the last shred of faith in man or God in her rebellion against this unmerited punishment; losing, by another's sin, the faintest hope of ever being able to regret or repent her misused life,—he felt almost that it was an

unpardonable guilt on his part to think of screening the man.

But he could not betray him—he could not! It did not even need that Elizabeth's image should rise in his mind to keep this resolve settled and firm. He did think of her—ah, with such pity! such yearning commiseration! Why, the miserable woman pining in prison on the far Pacific shore was almost to be envied compared to her! Launce realized fully what her life must be: that young face with all the joyfulness of youth gone out of it —those beautiful eyes, heavy with thwarted dreams, with blighted hopes, told their own story. She bore her burden, and would continue to bear; but Launce knew that her husband's character was no secret to her—knew that she lived degraded in her own eyes from this companionship, which must go on till death set her free.

At last Mr. Carstoe's voice roused him. Launce looked up. The old man had raised his head, and was gazing drearily at him.

"Can you see the right way, Cromlin?" he asked. "Is it clear to you what we ought to do?"

"Right or wrong, I shall never betray Darrell," returned Launce firmly. "That much is clear to me. Never!"

"I am glad; you must decide," Carstoe said with a sigh of relief. "It would kill her —no, the worst of it would be she would have to live—his wife, you know."

"I have no need to consider his wife," Launce replied almost harshly. "But that unfortunate woman; she must be set free, Carstoe."

"O that 's worse than anything!" cried the old man. "Her face haunts me like a ghost; just as she looked that day in court, with her awful eyes on Darrell, never moving—never—— O to think that I have helped condemn a human being unjustly—"

"You cannot blame yourself," Launce interrupted. "You could not have acted otherwise; it is useless to dwell upon that. But she must have her freedom now."

"How are we to do that without betraying him?"

"I don't know yet; but we must find a way. Who is the Governor of California now?"

"Charles Howell."

"An old friend of mine; a sort of connexion too," Launce said. "Carstoe, I must go to California at once. I believe I can convince Howell of her innocence without implicating Darrell; nor can she hurt him by anything she

may say or do after her liberation, even if she wished."

"I shall go too," Carstoe said. "I can't meet him again—I can't! I must resign my agency—I— He was kind so far as I was concerned; he more than made up to me my loss. It 's a hard blow, Launce Cromlin—a hard blow!"

"I know what you feel. Indeed, indeed I am sorry for you."

"I couldn't look in his face again," pursued Carstoe. "I scarcely know what to write; but he must know that I mean to resign the agency. He can send directions to me in California when he decides whom to appoint."

"When does a steamer sail?"

"On Saturday."

"You must take two places in your own name," Launce said. "I shall let people think I have gone to Europe. We will go on Saturday's steamer, Mr. Carstoe."

"You 're a great help and comfort to me," Carstoe said, wringing his hand. "I don't know how I should have managed—I could see no way out! But you 're young and quick; and you 'll be able to get the poor woman free, you are sure?"

"That must be done, at any cost; but I do

not think there will be much difficulty. This is Wednesday. You had better send at once and secure a state-room, Mr. Carstoe; the hotel people will attend to it. Then you must lie down and rest; you are not fit to be up. Don't think any more than you can help. So far as that wretched woman is concerned, we can set the matter partially right. I can't argue, but I must save Darrell."

"Yes, yes."

"Help and befriend her we can. We leave her still a criminal in the world's eyes, it is true, but her past life was such that she was helplessly ruined before. Even if she were cleared of this charge, human verdict would be as severe on her as ever."

"But we may find her a home, make her comfortable, try to keep her from going back to the horrors of the old life."

"That we can and will do! Now let us leave the matter, Carstoe; I am tired and sick with thinking."

"Shall we have to tell him that we know?"

"I see no purpose it can serve. If he finds out that the woman is free, and attempts to trouble her, we must,—not otherwise. I can't tell, if the facts were known, whether Darrell could be proved guilty. We *know* he is; but

the box belonged to my uncle: they are not Darrell's papers. O well, let it alone; we have decided what to do."

"I am almost afraid to see Mrs. Vaughan again."

"She knows you have been ill. You must tell her some business of your own calls you away. You have nothing more to do here, and cannot wait for Vaughan to return."

"I seem to understand so many things now," Carstoe said, after a brief silence. "I used to wonder sometimes at her manner toward him. It was somehow as if there was a great door shut between them; I can't explain. I half blamed her; I thought she did not fully appreciate him; it seemed her one fault. Now I see! Cromlin, she is a miserable woman—I never admitted it to myself, but she is—she knows that man as well as you or I."

"We can't help her," returned Launce shortly. "She chose her own life, and must endure it, God help her!"

"Did she choose?" questioned Carstoe, with an odd, perplexed expression crossing the pallor of his face. "I have been thinking of that too. O there's nothing my miserable old head hasn't turned and bothered over."

"Don't bother any more now," Launce said.

"Why no, it's further past remedy than all the rest," returned Carstoe, just thinking aloud in his bewilderment. "But she never knew—I am convinced of that. I could not understand her manner and her questions. Cromlin, she married him without knowing!"

"Knowing what?" asked Launce quickly, trying to believe that the man's faculties really were a little disordered by the shock he had received, yet feeling all the while that some new disclosure of Darrell's treachery was hidden under his words.

"About the codicil," Carstoe began, then got his senses back enough to realize that it was worse than useless—an absolute cruelty—to speak of the matter. "I don't know what I mean," he added; "I'm a blundering old idiot."

Cromlin had risen to go. He resumed his seat. His face grew firm and hard; and his voice sounded stern and cold, as he said,—

"What questions did Mrs. Vaughan ask you? I insist upon knowing."

"It was just a conversation I had with her—I don't remember how it came up—I thought she was prejudiced against you—I wanted her to like you—"

"Well, well?"

"But I've nothing to tell you—it's only a fancy. I did not think of it at the time," stammered Carstoe.

"Think of what? What did she not know?" demanded Launce. Then a sudden light struck him. He half started to his feet, a hot rage thrilled his pulses and blazed in his eyes. But he sat down again; when he spoke his voice was calm. "I want to hear that conversation; you have a wonderful memory for such things; I want to hear every word that passed between you," he said.

It was too late now to retract. Carstoe told the whole in his hesitating fashion, and when he had finished Launce Cromlin knew as well as if Elizabeth had actually revealed it, that Darrell had kept back the fact of his uncle having meant that the two cousins should have an equal chance to win her regard.

He knew this, and the discovery of the jewels rendered it easy for him to avenge the wrong he had suffered at Darrell's hands. But he did not want revenge—not even for an instant did the possibility of such action dwell in his mind. The thought came,—he would have been more than human otherwise,—but it did not take a second's hold upon him.

Presently he rose and held out his hand.

"I must go now," he said. "I will see you in the morning. Try and rest; have them secure the tickets; but don't attend to anything else or think any more to-day."

He walked slowly homeward through the bright autumn sunshine, forgetting the long voyage, the duty that lay before him, in the host of thoughts called up by Mr. Carstoe's revelation.

If that illness had not prevented his reaching Europe how different life might have been! But it was useless to reflect upon mere possibilities—a power stronger than his will had arranged the whole. He must accept existence as it came; the events which, one by one, overtake us we are powerless to govern; but a man's action, under the joy or discipline which comes, is within his own control. Launce was thinking this too, and he did not mean his life to be either wasted or weak. At least Elizabeth had learned to judge him differently from what she had once done—she did not believe him either an idle or a bad man. There was a certain pleasure in feeling this. His way must lead far from hers; now and then their paths might cross for a brief space, but that was all; and it might have been so different—it might!

Darrell Vaughan had kept secret the real conditions of their uncle's will; he had prejudiced father and daughter against his absent relative; Mr. Crauford's illness had hurried on the marriage. All these facts became clear to him as he went over the matter, putting the conversation he had held with Elizabeth, the day he read his uncle's letter, side by side with Mr. Carstoe's testimony.

Ah, life was not easy—Destiny was a stern task-mistress! Then Launce remembered in whose hand the universe was held, in whose eyes the humblest creature was regarded with pity and love, and got away from the fatalistic theories which haunt us all at times. He believed in God's mercy; he had faith in the Father's loving care; he would not doubt because his way led over sharp rocks and through thorny places.

But it was not easy—O it was not easy! He had lost the hope that makes youth beautiful; he had been shown a bewildering vision, whose fulfilment would have rounded his youth into perfection, then it had been snatched away. He had lost it too by a human being's treachery. Elizabeth was essentially a just woman; had she known the conditions of that codicil—the full, entire conditions—she would

have carried out her part to the very letter,—would have decreed that both men mentioned therein must have a chance given, if both desired it.

And if he could have met her—if he could have convinced her of his honesty and truth—O it might all have been so different! He found himself thinking this, and turned his mind resolutely upon other subjects. The vision he had cherished was dead—lost; this woman, who wore its likeness, was separated from him more effectually than if worlds swept between. She was another man's wife, and even speculation upon chances which had been allowed no trial was a sin.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT SHE FOUND.

It was a dark, dismal day, threatening a storm, but the rain kept aloof, and the air was heavy and oppressive. Elizabeth grew tired of the confinement of the house, and went out for a brisk walk.

She passed down the Avenue to the Parade Ground, intending to visit a sick woman in Amity Street who had formerly been in her employment. She had nearly traversed the block between Fourth Street and Amity, when she saw a group of mischievous boys worrying an unfortunate cat. At the same instant a little girl dashed out of one of the houses, and flew at the urchins in defence of the frightened animal. To do the *gamins* justice, they were not hurting the kitten—a melancholy-looking grimalkin, with more tail than he knew how to manage. They saw the lady standing on the side-walk, and retreated round the corner with a war-whoop, which might have led one

to suppose them descended from Mohawk chiefs instead of heavy Dutchmen or merry Emerald Islanders. The little Amazon seated herself on a door-step, and began to cry—not loudly; in a womanly fashion, wiping her eyes on her apron, while the cat lay in her lap, and stared up at her with an expression of indifference which spoke ill for his character in the matter of gratitude and other proper sentiments.

It was not possible for Elizabeth to see any creature in grief or pain and pass by "on the other side." She crossed the street, and as she neared the child saw that one of her hands was bleeding, and she still grasped in it the neck of a bottle, which she had evidently broken in her onslaught upon the boys, for her dress was stained with some dark-coloured liquid.

She was gazing disconsolately at the spots, and did not even look up as Elizabeth approached; but the cat saw the intruder, and immediately elevated its back and swelled its tail, as if expecting to be attacked by a new enemy.

The child was an odd-looking thing, too dark and pale to be pretty; but her short curly hair drooped over her forehead in a succession of sunny rings, and her features were delicate

and intelligent. Her hat had fallen off, and lay on the stones near Elizabeth, and her dress, though of very common material, had evidently been clean and tidy until that misfortune with the bottle befel her.

Elizabeth picked up the hat, and said kindly,

"I am afraid you have hurt yourself. You were a brave little girl to defend kitty; let me see your hand."

The child raised her eyes—great dark eyes, so beautiful that they glorified her whole face, and made Elizabeth wonder that she could have thought the creature plain. She stopped crying, gave the speaker a long, solemn look of inquiry, then glanced at the wounded fingers.

"I didn't know I'd hurt myself," she answered; "but I've broken the bottle, and now Aunt Jean won't have any liniment, for Mrs. Baines hadn't another scrap—not a scrap!"

The idea was so dreadful that it put her even beyond the relief of tears. She shook her head dismally, and let the fragment of the shattered phial fall.

"Perhaps we can manage about the liniment," Elizabeth said; "but the first thing is to attend to your hand."

"Why it does hurt," said the child in a tone

of surprise; "hurts like murder; but I didn't know it! And, O dear, my dress!—and it was a clean one—and I told Aunt Jean I 'd be careful; and now only look—and it was all Moses's following me downstairs — O Mose!"

Moses was the cat, and he at once proceeded to give another evidence of the ungrateful nature which had before exhibited itself in that contemptuous disregard of his saviour's distress. He deliberately spit at her with all his puny might—whisked his tail across her face—bounded out of her arms, and flew into the house with a sharp miaul of indignation and injured innocence.

"He lives there," said the child; "he 'll go upstairs and Sally 'll let him in."

"Sally is one of your playmates, I suppose?" Elizabeth said, wanting to keep the child's attention occupied, for she had taken the injured hand in hers, and on wiping away the blood perceived that there were two or three bits of glass to be got out of the fingers.

"Yes, ma'am," the child answered. "Only we don't play, 'cause Sally 's lame and walks with a crutch."

"Poor Sally; that is very hard, isn't it?"

"O she was born so—she don't mind," was

the philosophical answer. "O my—see here—you hurt!"

"It is all over now. I will do your hand up in my handkerchief. Is there a chemist's near here—a drug-shop, you know?"

"O yes, just round the corner."

"Then we'll go there and get some plaster for the cut. Does it hurt now?"

"Not much," replied the small maid. "Why you're awfully good, ain't you?"

Elizabeth put the hat on the child's head, and they walked toward the shop. There was nobody in but a long-legged, watery-eyed boy, and he took a great while to find the plaster—one of those abortive-looking creatures of whom you would prophecy that he would all his life be behind-hand with whatever he might undertake.

"O dear me, ain't I a sight!" Elizabeth heard the child sigh. "It's awful to be so messed, and Mrs. Baines hasn't got a scrap more liniment—not a scrap."

"Perhaps we can buy some here," suggested Elizabeth. "What is it for?"

"Rheumatism in the left arm," replied the child promptly. "But you couldn't buy it anywhere—it's stuff Mrs. Baines makes herself, and it's all roots and herbs, 'cause she

used to live in the country and knows how; but Aunt Jean don't, and nobody else I s'pose, though Aunt Jean once lived in the country too, but that was ever so long ago, in Scotland."

During the progress of these confidences, Elizabeth cleansed the blue dress as well as she could by rubbing it with some paper, while the watery-eyed boy peered at them over his shoulder, and quite forgot the plaster he had been sent to find. Elizabeth went to the case herself, discovered what was wanted, and soon had the child's wounded fingers neatly bound up.

"That's better now, isn't it?" she asked with her slow, beautiful smile, that never failed to carry comfort to the sick or suffering.

"O it's well enough, thank you," was the answer; "anyhow it's my left hand, so I can stuff all the same, and Aunt Jean's got a lot ready for me."

"What?" Elizabeth inquired, somewhat mystified.

"Dolls; she makes the kid parts and I stuff 'em, and then she sews the legs and heads on."

"So you have dolls enough to play with?" Elizabeth said.

The bright eyes gave her a rather contemptuous glance.

"It 's all foolishness," said she; "I 've seen too many of them made; but Sally Baines 's got a woollen rabbit with a squeak in it—that ain't so bad. She likes dolls though. Aunt Jean made her one once out of a broken-headed one that wouldn't sell, and so she wears a cap; but Sally don't mind."

By this time Elizabeth had paid for the plaster and was ready to go.

"There is a shop up toward Broadway where they have something that is good for rheumatism," she said; "if you like to go there with me I will buy a bottle for Aunt Jean."

The little face grew troubled.

"I don't know," said she; "Aunt Jean sent the money to pay Mrs. Baines, and I haven't got any more."

"But I mean to get it myself, you see."

"I 'm afraid Aunt Jean would send it back," returned the mite, still shaking her head. "She never takes anything she don't pay for, and I don't know as she 's got any more money to day; and you don't play with dolls, 'taint likely."

"But I know some children that I buy dolls for sometimes," Elizabeth said. "If you like, I will go with you and tell Aunt Jean how it all happened. Do you live far from here?"

The little creature interested her, and she wanted to see the place where she lived and the woman who had charge of her.

"No, not far; it's in Minetta Lane," the child said, still hesitating.

"Shall I go with you?"

"I—I do' know! See here—you ain't a deestrict, are you?"

"I don't believe I am," Elizabeth said, laughing. "What is it?"

"That's what Aunt Jean calls 'em—she's Scotch, you know; and there's another word—"

"O yes—a district visitor?"

"That's it: and how she does hate 'em! They don't come much now 'cause she told two or three that she had her Bible, and the tracts were no good—not even to stuff dolls, though she did cut some up to fill a pillow and I sleep on it."

"I am not a district visitor. Aunt Jean can be sure of that," replied Elizabeth.

"I didn't think you looked like one," said miss, with a smile of approval; "and I like your bonnet; they do wear such dreadful ones. And I expect Aunt Jean would be glad of the liniment, for she said her rheumatism was bad enough; but she'll want to pay."

From the chemist's they passed down Blucker Street, to the narrow, crooked byway, which was in old days the channel of a brook that still gives its name to the lane. The dwellings were clean and decent, and the house at which they stopped one of the most comfortable.

"I live here," said Meg. "I don't think the stairs are very steep."

They went up two flights, and Elizabeth's conductress knocked at a door, which was opened by an elderly woman, holding in her hand a half-finished doll. She dropped a civil curtsey, but seemed ill pleased at the sight of a stranger. Evidently her first thought was that another restless seeker after good works had come, prepared to show, by manner and words, that she supposed herself visiting a heathen.

"It's the lady that tied up my hand," Meg burst out volubly; "and how it did bleed. But O, I've broken the bottle, Aunt Jean, and I'm ever so sorry! But she bought some liniment, though I said you always paid, and it was Moses's running out after me that did it, and my dress is spoiled."

She began to sob. The woman tapped her head with the doll's one leg, but not unkindly, and said,—

"Don't cry, Megsie—spilt milk, ye ken!"

She dropped Elizabeth another curtsey, a little less stiff, and added, "I'm obliged to you, ma'am, for your trouble. It's not much of a place to rest in, but if you feel to tak' a chair after climbing the stair—"

The invitation was given in a doubtful tone, and scarcely came to a legitimate conclusion, still Elizabeth accepted it. Aunt Jean led the way through a dark passage into a moderate-sized chamber, which served as parlour and bedroom, but was scrupulously clean. A table stood near the window, covered with dolls in different stages of development—a rose-bush in a pot on the window-sill. The woman herself looked delicate and ailing; but though the eyes were keen and the lips compressed, it was not a hard face. Elizabeth felt sure that Meg had a far from unhappy home. Poverty was visible everywhere; but poverty in its better aspect, which struggles and works, and will so struggle to the end. Elizabeth knew the signs. This was a person who would starve rather than descend to beggary—just one of those cases it is a pleasure to assist and yet difficult. An offer of money to that resolute old body would have been an insult—no penny had ever found its way into her dwelling which had not been honestly earned.

Elizabeth seated herself in the wooden rocking-chair the woman drew forward, and related in a few words her meeting with the child; praising her courage, which had brought about the accident, and the fortitude with which she had borne her hurt, while Meg stood behind her chair and dolefully regarded her dress—at leisure now to indulge a purely feminine distress over the ruin which had befallen it.

"She told me you suffered from rheumatism," Elizabeth added, "and I ventured to bring you this liniment. I thought possibly you had never heard of it, and I know that it is an excellent remedy."

Aunt Jean's grey eyes softened and she smiled. "I thank you hearty," she said, taking the little bottle Elizabeth held toward her. "I hope I didn't seem rude when I first saw ye: I'se ask ye to excuse it if I did. I'm always thinking ony stranger is ane o' the district visitors, and I canna bide 'em, and that's the truth. And I dinna like tracts, and I dinna like my floor muddied, and I dinna like to be speered at for a heathen or a beggar!"

"And I shouldn't like it either," replied Elizabeth; "nor should I have taken the liberty to come, only I did not wish to leave the little girl after I saw that she was hurt."

She smiled, and the woman smiled in return: her obstinate old heart was fairly won.

"Dinna talk of liberty to such as me," she answered, "nae mair than the sunshine would; it does me mair good to see your face and be spoken to that gait than a quart of liniment! Megsie, go into the closet and tak' off your dress. I 'se warrant we 'll get those stains out, so dinna fash yersel', my woman."

"She is your niece," Elizabeth said, as the door closed behind the child.

"She 's nae kith or kin," replied Aunt Jean, shaking her head; "but I feel as if she was. She 's been with me ever since she was a baby, and she 's like to stay now."

"She has no father or mother, then?"

"She may have baith, or neither; I don't know for sure, and she knows nothing, and it 's better she never should. Ye understand?"

The child's little history was easy to comprehend from those few words. Evidently a common enough one; but out of the common was the fact that the poor, nameless waif should have found protection and kindness like these.

"What do you call her?" Elizabeth asked, not liking to question a syllable beyond the account the woman might choose to give.

"Her true name wad be Marguerite?"

"That is French."

"Like eneugh; it was her mother's before her, when she had a name, puir soul," murmured the woman.

"How old is she?" inquired Elizabeth.

"Oh, she'll be a bit past eight now, though she does na' look it."

Just then Meg came out of the closet in her ordinary dress, and seated herself on a stool by the window.

"Now I'm ready to stuff, Aunt Jean," said she. "I've wasted a lot of time, haven't I?"

"We'll let the stuffing bide the day," replied her protectress. "It's like your wee fingers 'll be stiff. Ye may gae up to the auld fiddler body, if you're liking."

Meg disliked to lose sight of the beautiful lady, but the temptation to listen to the violinist's music was irresistible, and she rose at once, though she looked rather wistfully at the visitor.

"Aunt Jean will call you before I go," Elizabeth said, understanding her thought out of that great sympathy she always had with children. "I am going to sit here awhile, if she will let me."

"Megsie," cried the old woman, "the rose-bush 'ull blossom after this; mind that!"

And Elizabeth thought in her life she had never received a prettier compliment.

Meg went out of the room and left Aunt Jean and her guest together.

"And you have taken care of the child—worked for her and supported her as if she were your own?" Elizabeth said. "I think you must be a very good woman."

"Eh, the bit she eats isna much; and she's help to me now," was the cheerful answer.

"You will not be offended at what I want to say?" Elizabeth continued.

"Dear heart!" exclaimed the other; "that voice couldna say anything it wouldna be a pleasure to hear."

"I am glad of that, Mrs.—"

"Murray — Jean Murray," supplied the woman. "It hae been my name aboon forty years; but it's nigh half that time since I lost the gudeman; he died in Scotland. Then I cam' across the water, and I've no fared ill, first and last."

"Will you tell me something about Meg?" asked Elizabeth gently.

"I'm drawn to," returned the woman; "that was why I sent her out. Odd times I

think I 'm growing auld, and no that strong I was; and only this morn I was wondering over it, and when you cam' in, somehow it was just as if something said to me the Lord has found the way. He does, leddy, in spite of all our fretting, always He does, if only a body could remember it."

The simple words of faith struck like a promise to Elizabeth's heart, which had been so bitter during these past days. She was glad too of anything that took her out of herself—gave a hope of being of use to any human being in however small a way.

"I never have talked to aye a creature about her," Mrs. Murray was saying; "it was naebody's business—the child had me. But since I took the long illness, and these weaknesses coming over me—but who was I to tell? —not thae Visitors, my certy, no!"

"I should like to help where the child is concerned, if you will let me," Elizabeth said. "I am not a philanthropist—"

"The vara word. I couldna speak it," interrupted Aunt Jean, in a parenthesis, with a shiver of disgust.

"But I have money, and I have no children," Elizabeth continued; and the quick-witted hearer noticed how her voice saddened,

but she gave no sign. "Sometimes I find children that I can help, can educate and bring up to learn trades and be useful. I might assist you about Meg; she ought to go to school—to—"

She stopped, for Mrs. Murray made a quick movement, and she was fearful of having annoyed her. Elizabeth had not a particle of the stuff in her composition which helps to make a philanthropist by profession. She was as shy of intruding where humble people were concerned, as careful of hurting their independence or pride, as if they had been formed of the delicate porcelain which enters into the composition of the great. She was a foolish creature in many ways, this Elizabeth!

"It's like having a dream come true!" Mrs. Murray said, in a low, awe-stricken tone; and a dew gathered over the sternness of her eyes, which had ached under too many troubles for tears easily to dim them. "Only the ither night, when the pain kept me awake, I lay thinking o' it. If only there was somebody able to do it, and with a kind heart—if I should be taken! And now you come—O leddy, ye maun hae been sent—I'd be a wicked woman not to let you do what He puts in your mind; and He's showed the way too."

"I must think what it would be best to do," Elizabeth said.

"It 's not now that help is needed—dinna go believing that," returned Aunt Jean eagerly. "I 'm able to work, and she pays for her keep. She has been to school too—there are plenty, gude and free, and I manage to dress her decent for that. It 's if onything happened to me!"

"I shall not forget," Elizabeth said. "But there is no reason why all the care of her should come on you. It is only right that you should be paid something for her board when she goes to school, and not have the expense of clothing her."

"I couldna tak' it, ma'am! Forgie me—I canna pit it into the right language—but it wad be like selling my hairt somehow," Mrs. Murray replied. "The claes and welcome, because of her not then having call to feel ashamed amang the ither bairns."

Elizabeth did not urge the matter. After a moment, Jean added with a shrewd smile,—

"Ma'am, I beg your pardon! But hae ye thocht hoo ye 're takin' me on trust?"

"I am not afraid to do that, Mrs. Murray."

"And ye 're ane to gae straight to the hairt an' motives—ye 'd be guided!"

Elizabeth laid her hand on the old woman's for an instant.

"Now tell me about Meg's mother," she said.

"Eh, it's awa' back, to begin wi' the commencement," said Mrs. Murray, picking up her glasses from the table, and rubbing them diligently on her apron. "Yes; a'maist ten year. I got a hurt in the street—a'maist rin doun wi' an omnibus in Broadway. The last thing I mind was a leddy in the crowd that got aboot me—the grandest dressed body—wi' e'en like twa stars. Someway I felt she could understand, and I ca'ed, 'No to the hospital—dinna tak' me to the hospital.' Then I tried to gie me address, but I couldna speak anither word. And it was her ainsel' answered me, 'Ye 'll not go, gude woman, I 'se promise thot.' Then it was a' mirk, and I swounded awa'."

She sat silent for some seconds, still polishing her spectacles. Elizabeth could see that she had to struggle hard to retain her composure.

"I get sae Scotch when I 'm a bit movet," she said apologetically. "Maist times I mind mesel', for I wadna hae the bairn tak' my way. It seems right ye suld knaw, though it can do nae gude, but ye 'll understand what I 'm always fearin' for the child, I couldna tell why."

Elizabeth bent her head.

"And when you came to your senses?" she asked.

"Ah!" resumed Mrs. Murray, drawing a long breath like a sob, "when I came to I was in a braw chamber, and a doctor there, and the leddy. I was in her house, she said, and I'd be cared for."

She stopped again.

"Were you ill long?" Elizabeth asked, to help her, for it was evident she found the story difficult to tell.

"Na, na, I wasna ill—bruised like. In the evening I could rise up. Dear ma'am, I canna bide to think what I did! I thocht I was vara gude and virtuous, a' the same I was a wicked Pharisee."

"I am sure you did not mean to do wrong," Elizabeth said.

"I did wrang though," answered the old woman, "as onybody does when they thank God they're not so bad as ither folk. She trippit into my room wi' anither gown on—she was aff to the opera, she said. She tauld me she'd need o' an honest body to be her housekeeper and mind the maids. She'd a fancy to me, she said; wad I stop? I was out o' wark joost then. I'd been to see a place that

vara day, and was too late. But that 's nae matter."

"So you agreed to remain," Elizabeth rejoined, eager, she could not have told why, to get to the end of the story.

"Ay, that was it! I 'll never forget how beautiful she looked, a' in white, wi' jewels in her hair; but her eyes were brighter still—the child's mind me o' them, odd times. Eh sirs, she wasna muckle mair her ainsel'; she 'd not hae been ower nineteen, puir soul!"

"Poor soul!" repeated Elizabeth pityingly.

"Yes. I 've telled eneugh; ye can speer the rest. When she 'd gane, I sleepit a bit. Wakin' again, her servant came till me, and we 'd a long crack aboot it a'. Then the jade let it oot that the bonnie lass lived wi' a mon wha wasna her husband, and she skirled awa and telled me how she garred her mistress pay a double wage because of her ain character.

"Then Milady, as she ca'ed her, cam' hame wi' a troop o' freends, and the hizzie said there 'd be supper and dancin' and mad doins till daybreak. So off she rin, for the leddy had come up the stairs and was ringin' her bell. I couldna to say walk, but I could mak' shift to win alang, and I 'd hae creepit on in hands and knees to be free the hoose. I didna reflect

that whatever she might be she'd been gude to me, and that it wasna for the like o' me to judge her. Silly doited auld carle, I thocht it a fine Chreestien thing to bear my testimony, as I ca'ed it, against sin!"

She mechanically took some bits of kid from the table and tried to work, but laid them quickly down, put her glasses off and on several times, while her features quivered as if she were crying, though she shed no tears.

"You believed you were doing right," Elizabeth said, longing to comfort her.

"Eh, dear leddy, I didna stop to think, I was that full o' mesel', ye ken. Aweel, I got out o' my chair and searched my claes, and though sair stiff and lame, I could hirple along. As I stepped doon the passage, oot shot the maid in a great takin' to know my wull, and then cam' the leddy too.

"'What do you want?' she says, kindly like.

"'Let me gang oot o' this,' says I. 'For the gude ye've done me ye hae my thanks, but I'd no hae tuk it an' I'd knawn. I'm an honest woman, and I tell ye the "wages o' sin is deeth!"'

"She sank back till the wa', like as I'd struck her, and went white i' the face. In a

bit minute she began laughing, but not hearty, just reckless like. 'Let her go,' she says, 'that 's the thanks one gets for helping these Chreestians.' I got doun the stair and out intil the night. As I was ga'en by the perlor-door I heard skirlin' an' singin', an' I felt like Lot a fleein' from Sodom; an' aiblins I was wickeder than she I condemned."

Mrs. Murray sat silent for a time. Her eyes were closed; her lips moved slowly. Elizabeth knew that she was praying. She looked up at last, and went on slowly,—

"I hae made it a lang story, but there 's little mair. I was awa' to New Orleans; I'd ga'en there wi' a sick leddy. She died sune. What wi' wark frae shops an' two bit bairnies to mind I was fairin' weel. I 'd took some wark hame and was hastenin' back, for I'd asked a neebor to sit wi' the weans, fearin' they 'd wake while I was gane. The night was mirk, and the wind howled, and the big river a roarin' like the sea. The rain cam' pourin', an' I rin wi' a' my might till I saw a woman crouched in a corner, sair droukit, puir thing! an' holdin' a bundle in her arms. It was a bairn. It began cryin' as I rin past. I stopped—the mother not hearin'—in a dwam like. I caught a glint at her face—Ou, it was Mileddy!"

"Did she recognize you?"

"Just at my voice she loupit up wi' a skreigh I can hear yet, an' the first words she said were thae haird ones I spoke when I rin awa' oot o' her house. 'The wages of sin is deeth,' says she; 'the wages o' sin is deeth; ye tauld me sae!' Weel, weel, I took her to my own bit place; it was one body's work to get her there, for she'd meant to droon hersel'. Happen it was nae a kindness to keep her here, wicked as it sounds, but I did it."

"She would not stay with you?"

"She bided the night and the next day; she was reicht dour and silent; waur than that, half-mad like. The mon had flung her aff and gaed his gate; she telled me sae much. She'd come to New Orleans wi' him; her wean was born there. O, ma'am, he left her, an' he took anither lass wi' him when he went, an' she was knowin' to it."

"It is too dreadful!" shivered Elizabeth. "Tell me what you did—what became of her."

"Waur 'than the deeth she was seekin'—waur than the black, black water she meant to hide her trouble under," groaned the old woman. "I took her to my airms, and begged her to let me help her an' the bairnie,

in token she forgave my haird words. The bit babbie was in a bad way. She 'd no milk for it, and it was nigh stairved. The night, when I thocht the puir body was sleepin' at last, I dozed aff, wi' the bairn beside me. She cam' and stood by my bed-side, beggin' an' prayin' me to keep an' care for the wean. I thocht her daft, an' had a muckle wark to comfort her wi' promisin' all she asked. Then she quieted, an' lay doun again, askin' me to pit the babbie by her. I was sair worn mysel', and slept sound till the morn's morning, an' the bairnie woke me wi' its skirlin'. Dear leddy, it was broad day, and she 'd gaed her lane to due penance for her sin."

"But you heard from her afterwards?"

"It was lang first—not till I was hame here. When we were talkin', she asked an address that wad always reach me, an' I gied her one, though I was mindin' the babbie, and didna think o' her meaning at the time. But I got a bit scrape o' the pen an' a hantle o' money —no news o' hersel', but just the money—it cam' a matter o' three times, plenty too; cheques frae a San Francisco bank. I was to write to a man there how the child fared, an' I did."

"But that is a good while ago."

"Ay! The last news that cam' to me was through an English sailor I knew—just chance. He was here, and when he saw Megsie he was that scairt he tauld me the story. As ye may think, I didna let out that the bairn was nane o' me or mine. It was a story about a drunken frolic he had in San Francisco. A parcel o' men robbed him at a drinkin' an' gamblin' place kept by a woman they ca'ed Mileddy. I 'd ha' known her wi'out the name, just by his account o' her looks. Eh, dear ma'am, she 'd gaed from bad to waur. He telled how she was mair like a fiend than a woman, only sae beautiful through it a', and gangin' always doun, doun!"

Elizabeth covered her eyes with her hand. Aunt Jean's simple words made the picture so terribly clear that it was unbearable.

"That was the last I ever heard," pursued Mrs. Murray; "four year and mair. It 's like she 's dead lang syne; it 's the best to hope. Ony way, she 'd be in God's hands, an' after a' that 's come an' gaen, He might judge her as man couldna do."

"And through His goodness you were allowed to save the child," Elizabeth said.

"Eh, dear ma'am, in ane way or anither He warks to bring gude out o' a' the wrang

and sin, in His ain way an' His ain time. Whiles it's haird to believe, but He does it!"

The touching words from the old Scripture narrative rose involuntarily to Elizabeth's lips. She did not speak aloud, but in her heart she cried, "Lord, help thou mine unbelief!"

"It's muckle the bairn need never ken," Mrs. Murray was saying. "The money 's a' pit by. I couldna use it—I couldna!"

"You are a good, good woman!" Elizabeth said; and Mrs. Murray only looked at her in mild wonder.

What made up a complete life? Elizabeth was thinking. Perhaps in the sphere beyond this the patient sacrifice of this lowly woman, the tender caring for this helpless waif and stray, should count for more than all the grand achievements, the far-reaching plans for human advancement, which had been the dream of her own visionary youth, even had she been able to carry them out in their fullness.

"I've always kept some bit trifles that I found," Mrs. Murray said presently. "They must have dropped out o' a bundle she had, wi'out her knowing it."

She went to a trunk that stood in a dark

corner, and unlocked it with a key she took from her pocket. She came back to the table, and set a small box down upon it.

"I've aye kept them in this," she said; "they're naught, but I couldna bear not to treat them carefully. Whiles I've fancied always they were just the first he'd given her that she kept after selling the rest, for he'd treated her so ill—a woman is aye a woman, ye ken."

She lifted a coral necklace of no great value —a simple ring—some withered flowers—a book. One could fancy, as the good woman said, that these trifles had each possessed a history. Perhaps the coral was the first gift of the man to his victim—the flowers might have been gathered some day the two had spent in the country.

"And this," Mrs. Murray said, holding up a silver cross with a horrified look. "A crucifeex! The puir lass pit it roond the bairn's neck hersel'—she's aye worn it till the ither day the ring broke. I had it mended, and she's no asked it yet—I've no the hairt to keep it frae her. Meg kens naething aboot its being a heathenish embleem, and I hae warned her ne'er to show it. And the book—it's Freench, I'm thinkin'. I haena looked at the things in

years, till I pit the crucifeex here—they 're awfu' to me—awfu'!"

She held the book toward Elizabeth. It had been richly bound, but was worn and tarnished. There were stains on the cover—perhaps the trace of tears—who should say?

Elizabeth mechanically opened the volume—it was a collection of Alfred de Musset's passionate lyrics. On the fly-leaf was carelessly written the one word—"Milady." Here and there on the pages other pencil-marks were visible—passages underscored—in certain places a date scribbled. To an imaginative person the book containcd a complete history.

"I 'd no seen the writin'," Mrs. Murray said, looking over Elizabeth's shoulder. "I just saw it was a foreign tongue—Freench belike; and that aye seems wickedness. It wad be in verse, I 'm thinkin'."

"Yes," Elizabeth answered, and still absently turned the leaves whose few pencil records seemed to make plain to her the black tragedy which, like so many another, had passed under the world's eyes without the world's heeding.

Mrs. Murray began collecting the finished dolls, and putting them in a basket ready to be carried to the shop. She had gone to the other end of the room. Elizabeth still lingered

over the pages, which possessed a painful fascination she could not dispel.

Toward the middle of the volume she came upon a page that had a couple of lines written on the inner edge; they were partially effaced by flourishes and careless marks, as if some person had done it absently while reading. She moved close to the window to see more clearly. It was an extract from the poem that had been written in a man's hand—then came again the name "Milady"—then another name —not distinct at first, but as Elizabeth stared at it, the words seemed to grow till they rose like gigantic characters before her horrified eyes.

The name was Darrell Vaughan, and the writing her husband's! It was a habit of his as he read to scribble absently on the margin of a page.

She felt dizzy and faint at this fresh proof of the vileness of the man to whom her life was bound, but the shock did not come with the violence it might have done to most wives. She had grown accustomed to proofs of his baseness—month by month, week by week, some new evidence was forced upon her. She tore the page from the book, and hid it in her dress—at least it must not be left for any other

eye to discover. She caught sight of her face in the little mirror; she was startled at its stern coldness. In the midst of her weakness and trouble she was conscious of wondering could it be the same face that used to meet hers in the glass?—the face that was once eager with bright dreams, out of which, young and fair as it still was, every trace of hope had worn away?

She drew her veil down and turned toward Mrs. Murray.

"I must go now," she said. "I have stayed a long time. I will come again soon; I shall not forget."

She was out in the air, hurrying through the streets toward her home. One reflection came suddenly up and brought a sort of comfort with it. At least she might make it her care that the future of this nameless child should be peaceful—kept far away from harm or evil.

Her husband's daughter, and she was childless! He had often reproached her with it, and sometimes she had grieved because the sweet blessing of maternity was denied her. She thanked God heartily now for the want which had helped to make her life solitary and grey.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOR HIS OWN SAKE.

ELIZABETH went back to her desolate home and sat down in the silence. The secret which she had discovered—which had been thrust upon her rather—could not outwardly affect her life. This was the clearest thought in her mind after those long hours of meditation—perhaps the hardest of all to bear. She was married to this man, and neither human judgment nor human law would be on her side if she were to throw her burden down for a cause like the present. She was old enough, had knowledge enough of the world to understand this. That page out of the dark book of her husband's past was filled up and put aside before her life touched his; she had nothing to do with it. That would have been the world's verdict. Even women, good, pure women, would unhesitatingly say that a young man's weaknesses and follies should not be submitted to a rigid, pitiless examination. No young man's record

would stand it. Men were exposed to temptations which women could not appreciate; besides, they often made better husbands if during their bachelor liberty they had gone through experiences "likely to teach them the folly of such things." Over and over Elizabeth had heard these arguments from feminine lips, and had learned to listen in silence. Her soul filled with bitterness, as many another woman's has done, when such theory and practice were forced upon her knowledge, and now it had become a personal matter; yet she was bound hand and foot. Still she was thinking more of that unhappy creature, a glimpse into whose history Mrs. Murray's words had offered, than of herself. Some wild idea rose in her mind as to the possibility of finding her out if she were alive—trying to help her. There came, too, a wilder idea of appealing to Darrell; begging him for his soul's sake to discover the woman and save her from the final consequences of misery and sin. It was all she could do; and was not this course a plain duty? O that word! Why, holy and beautiful as it had once seemed to her, it had grown the greatest stumbling-block in her path! She was always bruising herself against it at every turn, and to her piteous cries, her eager

questions, it returned no more answer than if it had been a dumb heathen idol, standing up with a smile of imbecile ferocity amid the ruined temple of her life.

What was her duty; what, indeed, was existence for; what part or place had she in the grand universal plan? Her place! A wife and yet widowed; that most terrible widowhood of the soul! A woman, in the fullness of her youth, in the strength of her powers, and no work granted, not even the sweet task of making home pleasant to a loving husband.

Thought was too dreadful, too dangerous; she must get away from it. She could only hold blindly to her faith, and pray that it might not forsake her.

The whole afternoon had gone unnoticed; the shadows of evening were filling the room, and still she sat there, holding the leaf she had torn from that book, trying always to see some gleam of light, some means, at least, of aiding her sister woman, of urging upon Vaughan the need of going back over that disregarded, perhaps forgotten episode, and trying if atonement were possible.

Disregarded—forgotten! this seemed the strangest, the most unnatural part of the whole matter. Could he have forgotten? Could he

be so utterly callous and hardened that not even a memory remained—not a pang of remorse?

Suddenly she heard her husband's voice in the hall, addressing one of the servants. He had come back without warning, as his habit was.

"Mrs. Vaughan is in the library? Tell them to hurry dinner, please. I am hungry and tired."

Then he entered; she saw him pause on the threshold and look about. His eyes, unaccustomed to the dimness, did not at first distinguish her, but she saw him clearly. She did not rise—she could not; the paper that fluttered in her trembling hand seemed the sign of a new and sterner barrier between their already widely severed souls.

"Are you here, Elizabeth?" he called pleasantly enough. "What a fancy you have for enjoying blindman's holiday!"

He was beside her now, holding out his hand. "How do you do—been well?"

He did not offer to kiss her. She noticed this, confused and troubled as she felt; noticed it, and was glad.

"I did not expect you to-night," she managed to say, and rose slowly, letting her fingers lie passive in his clasp.

"How cold your hand is—the room's like a furnace though—you stay shut up too much,"

were his next words. Then he gave a fretful little laugh. "Have you got to the end of your welcome already?" he asked.

"I hope you have been well. Were you successful in your business?"

For the life of her she can think of no other words! That paper is still in her hand; she can neither turn her eyes from it nor hide the page, though she would like to do one or the other.

"Yes, to both questions," she hears him say. Then he adds, "I should think we might as well have the good of what little light there is."

He goes to the window near her chair, and pulls back the curtain which Elizabeth had dropped over the casement when she entered the room hours before.

"Upon my word, this a cheerful sort of welcome for a man to receive!" he exclaimed, turning towards her again. She is still standing, her eyes fixed on the torn page. Dim as the light is, she can see his name written there; the characters fairly burn before her eyes.

She is at a loss what to do. To leave the matter without making some appeal to him she feels impossible. But whether it is better to wait or in what words to frame her explanation she cannot think.

"I will hurry the dinner," is all she does say; there is a kind of relief in falling back for an instant to the safety of some common-place household matter.

"Thanks. I told Martin. I dare say they will manage. I should be sorry to trouble you," he replied with an elaborate civility, which betrays his rising anger.

If she could talk—get that paper out of sight—keep down to the level of ordinary subjects, if only for a time. To let the matter in her mind come up in a way to cause contention or harsh words would be to add to its loathsomeness. There must be no quarrel; he is dead to her; absolutely dead! What she must say, let her try to speak as dispassionately as if she had been set free from this earthly bondage, and had come back to plead with him.

Just then he notices the paper in her hand. He is always ready with suspicions; he never fails to believe the worst of any man or woman. Some quick thought that he has taken her by surprise is what goes through his mind. She is agitated—confused. Perhaps he has come near some secret. Is it a letter?—does some feeling lie at the bottom of her odd manner?

"What are you holding; what have you got

there?" he exclaims, and tries to draw the paper from her.

"Don't take it—don't touch it," she replies, putting her hand behind her.

"I insist on knowing what this means! Give me that letter."

"It is not a letter," she says; "it is only a page out of a book."

"A page out of a book! Then what are you hiding it for?" retorts he, and pulls her arm roughly.

A swift, sudden indignation rises in Elizabeth's soul—a prouder creature never breathed. The scowling, angry face confronting her does not bring any sensation of terror as it might to a weaker woman.

"Let me go, if you please—this instant!"

The voice is very low, but there is something in its tone which brings him back to his senses—something in the haughty coldness of her face which reminds him, as it has done before, that with her no show of threat or tyranny will serve. His hand drops; he retreats a step, and Elizabeth sinks wearily back into her chair.

She realizes that this is no fitting moment to bring up the subject which has been in her mind during these hours since her return home.

Months and months ago she decided that another quarrel between them must be fatal. Strife shall not come now; certainly not in regard to this matter about which she feels so strongly the importance of acting aright. It may be that his soul and hers must endure for a period, which to mortal comprehension would seem endless, the consequences of their action at this crisis.

Something of these thoughts, this resolve, he sees in her face—what they mean he cannot of course tell. So often he has been irritated, half-maddened by the unknown language written on her countenance—many a time of late he has almost hated her therefor.

"You and I are reaching a point where some sort of explanation will be necessary," he says angrily. "I don't mean to be met at every turn by obstinacy and secretiveness—mysteries made out of every trifle just to irritate me. If you have any secrets, I advise you to be careful."

"O stop—don't say any more," she answers wearily. "We have nothing to quarrel about—do not invent reasons—let us have such peace as we can find."

"I want that paper," he persists. "I am determined to know what it is! I wish to

understand why my coming home unexpectedly puts you in this state! I have not the slightest intention of playing the part of *un mari sage*, and timing my arrival to suit any little plans you may happen to have on foot."

"If you will not be quiet I shall go," she says, rising. "Perhaps you will have come back to your senses by the time dinner is ready."

With an unexpected movement he snatches the paper from her hand, so carried away by anger that for an instant he half believes that he holds some secret. Well as he knows her, forced as he is to feel her honour and truth, detesting her sometimes therefor, with one side of his distorted mind, he half believes his devilish suspicions for an instant.

"Now then for your little private letter!" he cries.

"Not yet—don't look at it yet," she pleads. "I meant to tell you, but not with such feelings between us! O, of all things in the world over which we might have trouble, do not let us choose this! Let me tell you in my own time—my own way. Let us try for once to act together and to act for the best."

"It is my opinion that I shall have to end by paying for your keep in a madhouse," is the answer she receives.

She has laid her hand on his arm; he shakes it off.

"I beg you to wait!"

"And I beg you not to touch me," he retorts; "my susceptibilities are as keen as yours. Hands off, if you please! I shall not wait—I shall read it!"

"Then read—read it and be done," she answers, and once more seats herself.

A fresh sensation of hopelessness strikes her. Even if she tries to do right, something prevents her doing it in a manner which could bring about the good she desires. She cannot tell if it be fate or her own error, but so it always happens. He must have his way; she can struggle no longer.

Vaughan is laughing bitterly, scornfully, as he lifts the paper. It is only a printed page after all.

"What do you mean by such a performance?" he asks. "A nice bit of work over an accursed little—"

He stops. He has caught sight of the writing, and he recognizes it; he deciphers the lines, more, it seems to him, by a sudden action of memory than anything else.

"*Milady—Marguerite.*

"*Darrell Vaughan—Darrell Vaughan.*"

Something shivers at his heart as if a hand of ice had suddenly been laid there. Were he able to analyze his thoughts, he could not tell whether it is pain, what men call remorse, or only rage. But he feels as if a ghost had started up before his eyes—yes, a ghost, though his materialistic creed would not grant any significance to the word invented to frighten children.

It all comes back—incident after incident of that episode in his life so long perished—of the very day he wrote those lines—the beautiful face which looked up into his as he laughingly pencilled them—the face radiant with youth and loveliness! More than this, he sees the crowd in the Court-room—that face looks out at him again, awful in the wreck of its beauty, in its apathy of despair. These pictures flash before his eyes as a gleam of lightning reveals phase after phase of a landscape that has been hidden beneath the blackness of a tempest till it looks unfamiliar.

He turns angrily upon Elizabeth.

"Have you been spying—hunting among my things—"

Then he stops, conscious that he has betrayed himself.

"I will tell you how I found it," he hears Elizabeth say.

"Nonsense! What is it anyway? I am sure you must be out of your senses—making a scene over a scrap of an old book."

This with some feeble pretence to cheat not only her but himself—to get away from those flashes of memory that burn and sear somehow as they have hardly done during all these years of secrecy and guilt.

"We must talk about it," Elizabeth says firmly. "I cannot live, Darrell Vaughan—I cannot bear my part of the burden unless you will take some means—try in some way to atone."

"Now see here—"

"Stop, stop, listen to me!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort! You have found, Heaven knows how or when, a scrap of an old book, and you choose to build up a romance, and go into one of your fevers, and act when I come home more like a lunatic than anything else."

She sits upright in her chair now. Every trace of emotion has left her face; her eyes are full upon him with that cold, searching expression he has learned so well—a look that always irritates him more than the most bitter words could do.

"Why you showed me this I cannot imagine," he hurries on, forced by his natural dissimula-

tion to keep up this farce of falsehood, however vain and shallow he may feel it to be.

"Don't say any more, don't!" Elizabeth says, and her voice falters. It makes her faint, sick, the miserable attempt to deceive at a moment like this, when all she longs for is to help him into some course of right action. "Let me tell you—I am not angry, I don't mean to make a scene; but you must hear."

"I'll hear nothing more of your absurd fancies; some ridiculous whim; a trick you have gotten up to annoy me," he persists still, and cannot stop, though he feels the absolute absurdity of the position he has taken.

"I must tell you, Darrell, for I have found —Milady's child."

She hesitates a little over the words. Even now, after all that has come and gone, after all she has lived through, the misery and degradation he has forced upon her, she shrinks from the task of showing him that she sees his soul as it really is. But she has spoken the words. A brief silence follows.

"Well, what do you mean to do now?" he asks sullenly.

"It was about that I wanted to speak," she replies. "If that had been all, I would never have told you—I would have cared for the

little thing and been glad to; but there 's something more to be done."

He leaves her side, and walks up and down the room among the shadows. Elizabeth rises from her seat and approaches him. He turns toward her frowning blackly.

"I 'll just tell you one thing," he says; "you 're the curse of my life, and I hate you!"

The cruel words do not anger her; they do not even cause her pain. What she thinks of at this moment is to succeed in her purpose—to find some appeal which shall move his heart or his conscience.

"There is no need to talk of yourself or me just now," she answers, moving beside him as he resumes his march. "I am not minding for myself—I can't even care about what you say—"

"Because you are stone—ice!" he breaks in passionately. "All you want is to set yourself up on a pedestal of dignity and virtue, and show how much better you are than other people! Better! Wait till you are tempted; wait till you have blood in your veins before—"

He ends the speech only by a gesture—a movement as if his impulse were to strike, but lets his hand drop to his side.

She must go on—she must tell the rest. Personally she is powerless to act, but she cannot endure the consciousness that she has made no effort to aid that hapless woman, to aid Darrell himself in the strife of his evil instincts against his own soul.

"Don't talk of me," she says; "don't think of me if you can help it. I am nothing in the matter."

"Then why do you meddle with it?" he interrupts. "I suppose you mean to do heroics! I should think you were old enough to have learned common sense. Do you suppose men are angels? Do you think there is anybody that has not gone through some infernal folly of the sort?"

"I don't judge you; try to understand me. It is not that! I only want—O Darrell! it is never too late to set wrong right; never too late to atone!"

He looks at her now with only an expression of amazement in his countenance.

"Now what have you got in your head?" he asks.

"If she could be found—she went to California—it is long ago—but she might be found—she might be helped. She was ill—suffering; she—"

"Who the deuce told you all this fine romance?" he breaks in. "Now let's finish and have no more words. I've no intention of pretending not to understand. There was such a woman, and I was a young fool! If there was anybody deserved pity it was I. But it is useless to try to make you comprehend that."

"She was so young, so—"

"Will you be quiet? I tell you that you don't know what you are talking about! The woman was one of the worst creatures that ever lived. As for all that stuff—the child and all that—it might be mine or anybody's! Now don't shiver and shake—you've brought it on yourself—try and look at the business in a reasonable light."

"O don't I tell you it makes no difference where I am concerned?" she groans. "Only let us try to do something. Don't remember I am your wife; just think that we are two friends—that I want to help—that I shall be glad and thankful to help."

"Why what is there to be done?"

"The child. If there is nothing else to be done, we might—"

She cannot finish; he is laughing! O, if he had heaped abuse upon her, struck her to the earth, she thinks it would have been little to

bear in comparison to this proof of his utter hardness!

"Perhaps you 'd like to adopt the brat—do the good Samaritan, so as to have a proof of my wickedness always at hand," sneers he.

"I would take it if you would let me," is her answer; "I would love it. Who knows? Perhaps she might bring a blessing into our home."

"Of all exasperating women you are the worst!" he exclaims. "Now let this be the last time you ever mention the subject. I should think you would be ashamed to mix yourself up with such wickedness—so fine and virtuous as you are."

"And you will do nothing?"

"No! A pretty idea if a man is to hunt up every vile woman that happened to fasten herself on him when he was young and silly! If that was the law, I 'm thinking you 'd find some of your religious friends with a sort of harem that would astonish you."

She has gained nothing—done no good! That is all she thinks or cares for. She does not even heed the coarse words which at another moment would have hurt her worse than blows.

"I cannot bear it!" she cries, "I cannot

bear it! She was young—she was a woman—she must have been innocent once—"

"Now I doubt that," Vaughan breaks in again with cool irony. "She was born utterly depraved and abandoned. I see what you fancy—that I ruined her life—drove her to sin, as you call it. Nothing of the sort. Why you ought to be ashamed to make me tell you such things. Of course you would blame me—you would be certain I had been wrong! I suffered enough from that she-devil. I hope she's dead!"

"Darrell!"

"I hope she's dead! She nearly ruined me; she— Why she was a liar and a thief! Look here, you needn't talk about hunting her up. I remember now, she was concerned in a murder or something of the sort. I heard of her in California; they lynched her, I think. A wretch, a devil; and you come laying her sins at my door! I'll not endure it. I'm tired of you always trying to believe some ill of me. Let me alone, or I'll make you repent it."

How much is acting, how much genuine rage, Elizabeth cannot tell. It does not matter. As usual, she has done harm in her effort to act aright. She is ready to believe ill of him

—she feels that—is it strange? She has every reason; but what good can follow harsh words or recrimination? If she had only been silent —yet that seemed impossible. She has accomplished nothing, but she has done everything in her power. She knows that each word he speaks is false; she cannot credit him, though there would be a certain relief in doing so. Whatever she had since grown under the brutalizing effects of an evil life, the woman had loved him. She had been young, and fair, and—O why think, why torture herself! She is helpless—helpless! Living or dead, the outcast is beyond her reach. It had seemed so easy, as she thought, of ways and means to help, and a wall, a great black wall, has suddenly been built between her and the possibility.

Something for the child she may do—in secret. Darrell Vaughan's child—his eyes, his expression. There is proof there which even he could not resist were she set before him.

When she looks up from that whirl of dizzying reflection she is alone. Vaughan has left the room without her observing it after that last furious tirade. The torn page lies at her feet, where he flung it: she picks it up; smoothes it out; hides it away. She cannot

destroy the record; utterly worthless as it is, she can no more do it than she could spurn the wretched creature herself if she were to appear suddenly and beg for help. Dead—dead as the penalty of her crimes! Vaughan had said this; it is not true! There seems no reason for doubting him, but all the same, Elizabeth feels that it is not true.

It is quite dark; dinner must be nearly ready. It is time to dress; every wearisome, petty detail of common life must go on. Shock after shock may come,—she may be thrust further and further into the gloom and cold, further and further from any hope whereon to steady her mind,—but life must go on! The miserable pretence must be kept up: dinners eaten, friends greeted, the whole round of daily existence endured, while her soul stares out into the blackness with aching eyes, and can scarcely find a ray of light to remind her that above all and beyond all, the misery, the sin, there still stretches heaven with its future.

Her dressing-room is lighted, but the maid is not there.

Vaughan enters quickly; he has heard her step. He comes holding a letter in his hand.

"Why didn't you tell me Carstoe was

gone?" he asks. "What the devil does it mean—is this your work too?"

"I had no time to remember," she answers. "He told me business called him back to California. If I had thought about it I should have supposed you knew."

"The old fool has resigned the agency!" exclaims Vaughan. "Now just tell me what that means."

"I have no idea; he did not speak of it to me."

She is telling the truth—he sees that.

"Ungrateful old hound!" he mutters.

"I don't think Mr. Carstoe is that," Elizabeth replies absently. "It seems odd—what does he say?"

"Say—say? Read his letter and see! You may dine without me—I am going out! You have managed a pretty welcome for a man after a month's absence! You're a lovely pattern of a wife—a model of the domestic virtues!"

Then he flings out of the room. Elizabeth reads Mr. Carstoe's letter. It affords no explanation; he only says that circumstances compel him to resign his trust. While in California he will arrange the business matters so that they can be placed in some other hands.

If Mr. Vaughan will write at once and appoint a new agent, he, Carstoe, will be glad, as he desires as soon as possible to be freed from his present duties.

What it means Elizabeth does not know, but she feels that the brief, constrained letter has a meaning, and a painful one. In some way his illusions in regard to Darrell Vaughan have been dispelled—he knows him for what he is: so much significance the letter has to her.

They come presently and tell her dinner is ready. She makes some excuse for her husband, but not a soul among the domestic band is deceived. They know very well that Mr. Vaughan is subject "to his little tempers," smooth as he appears to the outside world. They comprehend perfectly that he has left the house under the influence of one of these attacks. They talk it over among themselves of course, and are divided in opinion as to whether the blame rests with the master or mistress of the mansion, and, after a general instinct of human nature, end in blaming both about equally, and finding a certain pleasure in so doing.

END OF VOL. II.